

THIRD EDITION.

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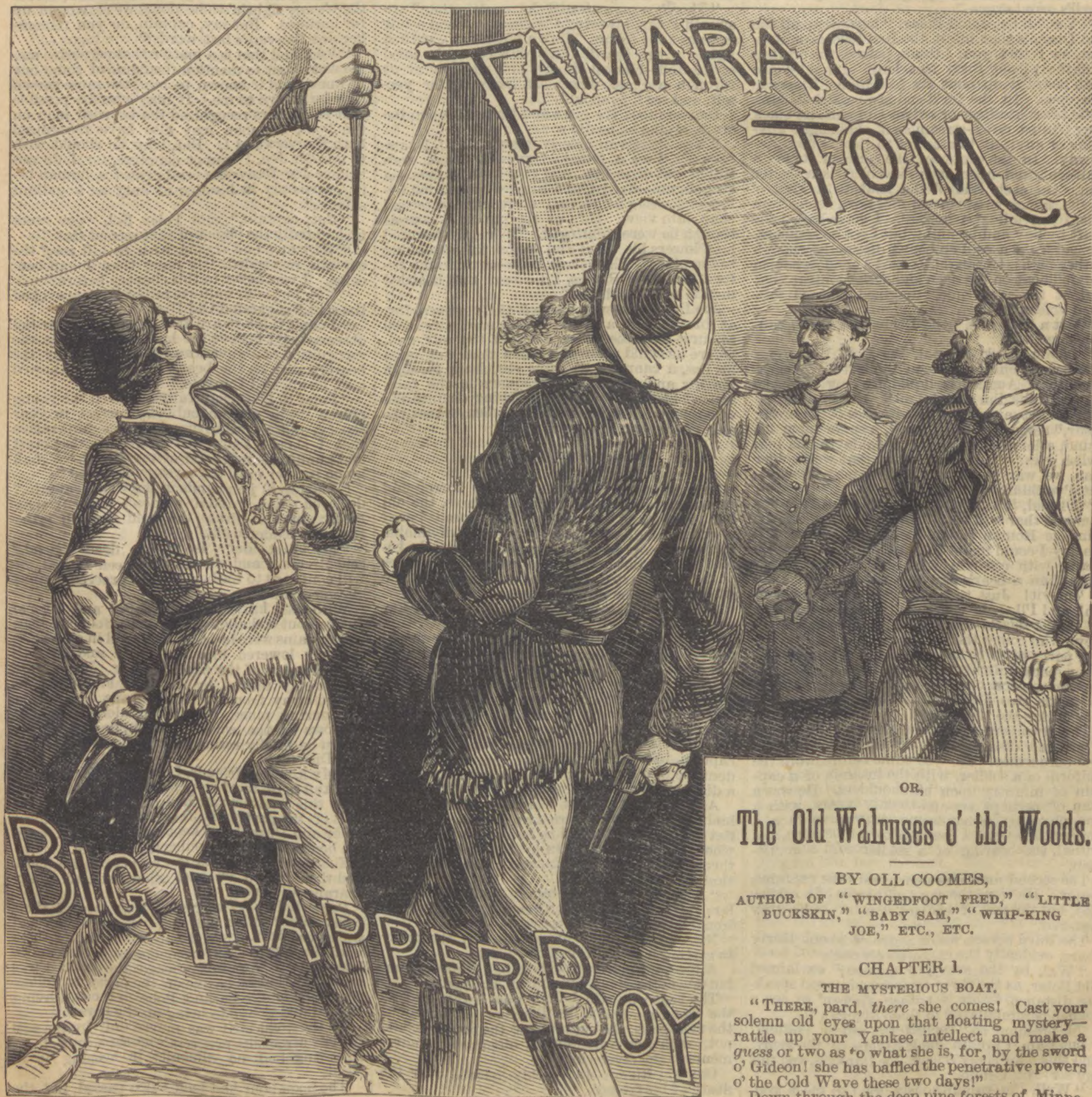
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OR,

The Old Walruses o' the Woods.

BY OLL COOMES,
AUTHOR OF "WINGEDFOOT FRED," "LITTLE
BUCKSKIN," "BABY SAM," "WHIP-KING
JOE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS BOAT.

"THERE, pard, there she comes! Cast your solemn old eyes upon that floating mystery—rattle up your Yankee intellect and make a guess or two as 'o what she is, for, by the sword o' Gideon! she has baffled the penetrative powers o' the Cold Wave these two days!"

Down through the deep pine forests of Minnesota, to its home in Winnipeg rolled in majesty

"HOLD, MEN! IT WAS THIS BLADE WIELDED BY THIS ARM THAT SLEW JUAN ALVAR!"

the Red River of the North, bearing upon its tranquil bosom a strange craft.

For years without number, almost, this great river had been the highway, as it were, of the Northwest. Its waters had been traversed by the canoes of the plumed and painted savages, the bateaux of the hardy *voyageurs*, and the great rafts and flatboats of the traders, hunters and trappers. Many curious-looking crafts had been seen upon its bosom in years gone by, but about none of them was ever that air of suspicion—of mystery, that hung over and around the one to which the above remarks referred.

The speaker was the noted hunter, Polar Sol, and the man to whom he addressed his words was his old-time friend, Old Dismal, of "Deer-Lodge" fame.

It was an August day, warm and sultry. The sun had not yet reached the zenith and his rays fell aslant upon the two hunters who stood upon the west bank of the river.

Above the borderman the river stretched away for nearly two miles in a straight line, but the mysterious craft was less than a mile away, floating at the will of the strong current.

"I'll have to wait till she comes closer afore I give an opinion," Old Dismal replied to Polar Sol's speech. "It may be a pirate concern, or it may be a floatin' meetin'-house goin' to do work among the red savages and Polar Sol's o' the wilderness. Then, ag'in, it may be the devil's own barge—"

"Yes," interrupted Polar, "huntin' up all the Old Dismals that infest the Red River country. But, as I told you, I think, before, the craft is a flatboat 'bout forty feet long. Its sides are both boarded up 'bout six feet high. The ends are open. In the for'd end is a wolfish-looking little brass howitzer or swivel-gun with its black mug p'inted down-stream as if challengin' anything or anybody to attempt to dispute its right-o'-way. In the center of the concern stands a wall-tent, and upon each side o' it is a shelter tent. On each side o' the boat, to a kind o' davits, hangs two canoes; and now, aside from this, I can tell you nothin'. I have hailed the craft by day and by night, but I got no response. I never see'd a soul on board distinctly, though t'other night I thought I see'd a shadowy form movin' 'bout on the open end o' the contraption, and, at the same time, 'magine I heard subdued voices."

"Bet a bear-pelt," said Dismal, "it's an abandoned craft."

"D'you think, Dismal, the Cold Wave is a slumberous ejlot? Do you think this furnace-warmth o' August is liquidatin' my intellect? Do you think I'm growin' mellow with age?"

"I'm not an expert on diseases o' the brain, Polar," responded Old Dismal, a smile upon his round, solemn face, and a twinkle in his big, owl eyes; "but I'm certain that we're older than we war years ago, and we may be wiser; but d'ye think we're better men?"

"Dismal, if that's to be Ingin-fightin', as it's rumored thar will be, I'll show you that I'm the same ole Roman legion as of yore. I've see'd the day I could make the tinklin' riv'lets gurgle hoarse with red-skin gore, and muss up things wuss than a bear's paw in a bee-hive; an' I kin do 'em yit! Just trot out your red-skins, Dismal, and I'll show you some paintin' and fresco-in' that'd dazzle the eyes o' the old masters—Hey! who comes there?"

A party of three horsemen, with two heavily-laden pack-animals following behind, were discovered approaching through the woods, and to them the two old hunters now turned their attention for the time being.

The strangers drew rein a few rods from the river, and dismounting, advanced toward the two bordermen. He who came before wore the uniform of a soldier, with the insignia of a captain of infantry upon his shoulders. He was a man of perhaps six-and-twenty years, with a fine physique, a handsome, expressive face, a pleasant blue eye, a heavy brown mustache, and withal, the bearing of a soldier and a gentleman.

The second man was some years the captain's senior. He wore the cap and blouse of a soldier also, but the rest of his suit was of some gray material.

The third person was a negro of about thirty years, evidently the captain's servant.

"Wal, by the sword o' Gideon!" exclaimed Old Polar, as the three came within good speaking distance, "this is ruther s'prisin' to see a soldier perambulin' in these diggin's."

"I presume so," replied the officer politely; "but I am Captain Jack Rivers, of the army, and this man is my friend, Joe Danvers, and this my servant, Congo."

"Well, I'm tumultuously glad to meet you,

Captain Jack, Joe Danvers, and Mr. Congo," declared Polar Sol, shaking hands with each of the party. "My name is Polar Sol, and now let me interduce you to my solemn-faced chum, Old Dismal. We're a pair o' ole walrusses o' the woods, and have been standin' here an hour with our curiosity all wound up like a fish-reel."

"Surely our presence hasn't been the cause of your perplexity," observed the captain.

"Not all, Captain Jack," replied Old Sol; "though we were some'at s'prised to see you here; but if you'll throw your eyes up the river you'll see on its bosom what's up."

"Ah! I see some kind of a raft or boat," said the captain, after scanning the river above.

"Yes; it's a cross between a raft and a flatboat; but who's aboard o' it is what's puzzlin' us," Polar Sol added, and then he went on and narrated what he knew—or rather, what he did not know—of the craft.

"I'll bring the field-glass and take a peep at the thing through it," said Danvers, and hastening to his horse, he returned with the glass and handed it to Polar Sol.

The old borderman adjusted the instrument to his eyes, and for fully five minutes gazed at the craft, occasionally giving an exclamation of surprise at what he saw.

"Don't look the thing outen countenance, Polar," adjured Dismal, impatiently, "but tell us what you see."

"There's a man aboard the contraption," answered Polar, lowering the glass. "I had a fair squint at the fellow. He's a large chap, with a light brown beard. He's dressed up in good style, and—blamed if he ar'n't lookin' at us through a glass. Look, Mr. Danvers, for yerself, and see if I'm right."

Danvers took the glass and turned it upon the craft, saying as he did so:

"Yes, there's an elderly man, and, if I mistake not, I see a female form—but there, she's flitted out of sight! Ah! they've a cannon—a swivel-gun—aboard, as I live. The bearded fellow is looking at us, and there comes a second chap into view. He's at the gun, and acts as though he were sighting it. There, the bearded man lowers his glass and seems to be speaking to the other. I'll declare, I've seen that man before. Captain Rivers, I'll swear that bearded man is no other than—"

Joe Danvers never finished the sentence, for, at this moment, a cloud of white smoke was seen to burst from the forward end of the raft, and, before he could utter the name that was upon his lips, a cannon-ball came shrieking through the air and, striking him square in the face, tore off his head and went crashing on into the woods through which rolled in sullen echoes the roar of the murderous gun!

CHAPTER II. A VISION OF BEAUTY.

SPEECHLESS and motionless, with horror and consternation depicted upon their faces, the old borderman and the captain stood and gazed upon the headless body of Danvers as if unable to fully comprehend the ghastly spectacle before them. But quickly the rebounding echoes of the gun started Polar Sol to a sense of the situation, and he exclaimed:

"Sword of Gideon! what means this murderous work?"

"My God!" cried the captain, "this is shocking—inhuman! Oh, my poor, brave old friend!"

"It settles the fact," said Old Dismal, "that yonder craft is a hulk o' bloody pirates, and it would be just as safe, perhaps, for us to step back under kiver o' the woods for they know how to handle a gun."

"That is very true, Dismal," assented the captain, his voice choked with grief; "it is seldom the first shot fired from a howitzer at such a distance is so accurate—down!"

As he uttered the last word the captain, who had his eyes upon the craft at the time, dropped flat upon the earth, and he had scarcely done so when a second ball from the cannon tore through the air above him and crashed into the timber.

"A lucky dodge, captain," declared Old Polar; "if you'd been up on yer feet that shriekin' iron'd 'a' chopped you in two."

Not another moment was lost by the party in getting under cover of the woods.

A few minutes later a third ball came screaming down the river, but did no damage.

The boat was still half a mile away, and as the shot that had killed Danvers had destroyed the field-glass, the captain and the hunters could not, with any satisfaction, observe the movements of the mysterious foe.

Captain Rivers was deeply grieved over the death of his friend.

"Poor Danvers," he said in a melancholy tone; "he was one of my truest and noblest friends, and but for his kind regard for me he would never have been here."

"Captain, are there any other soldiers in this country besides you and Danvers?" asked Dismal.

"None that I know of."

"Then you are a long ways from camp."

"I left my command in Northern Montana two weeks ago. My time in the service had expired, or rather my resignation having been accepted, I was about to start for my home in Southern Ohio when I received word that my brother, who is a post-trader on the Crow Wing River, had been shot, and seriously if not fatally wounded. He was anxious that I should come to him, and believing I could make time by crossing the country on horseback, I struck out with Danvers and Congo. We have met with no danger until this hour. Danvers was a soldier in my company. His time expired months ago, but he remained at the fort waiting until I could return home with him. But now I must consign his remains to the grave and with a sad heart go on without him."

"Then you've heard nothin' o' Ingin troubles brewin' in these parts?" Old Dismal queried.

"Nothing, sir, whatever."

"Wal, it may all be a hoax, but Polar Sol and me's down here to 'vestigate the matter; for, if there's any fightin' to be done, we're wound up for business. But say, captain, do you remember Joe Danvers's last words?"

"I do, and that is a matter that perplexes me. He was about to mention the name of some one he knew, and if known to him, the same person may be known to me. It may also be possible that if Danvers recognized the bearded man on the boat, the man may also have recognized both Danvers and I. But, why he should wish to murder Joe, I cannot conceive, for I do not believe Joe Danvers ever harmed a human being, save only in his line of duty as a gallant soldier."

"But, captain," said Polar Sol, "you were undoubtedly the object of that second shot."

"Why any one should wish to kill me," the captain responded, "is more than I can conceive. I was never in this country before."

"Yes, but your uniform might have provoked the shot," suggested Old Dismal.

"I can't think it are that, Dismal," Polar Sol observed; "I believe the hull secret lies in the recognition of Danvers and the captain by the bearded man on the boat. If Danvers knowed him, he knowed Danvers."

"Polar Sol," thoughtfully observed the young officer, "you are undoubtedly correct in your theory, and so believing, it seems imperative that I should know who is aboard that craft and punish the murderer of my friend. I shall go no further until the mystery is solved."

"Then we'll join hands in the work, captain," declared Polar, "and if we don't make it spasmodic for that pirate the Cold Wave'll retire from the fodder-walk."

"My first duty is to my dead friend," said Rivers, "and when he has been buried, we will confer as to the best way to proceed against our enemy."

With their knives and hands Sol and Dismal scooped out a shallow grave at the foot of a tree. The remains were brought, wrapped in a blanket, tenderly lowered into the grave and covered from the view of the world forever. The captain was deeply moved by his loss, and when he turned away from the lonely grave beneath the murmuring pines, he walked alone into the shadows of the woods to compose his grief. When he finally returned, he said to Polar Sol and Dismal:

"My kind old friends, I am ready for action."

"And here, too," responded Sol.

By this time the raft had drifted within fifty rods of the party, and from their concealment Polar and Dismal had kept a close watch upon the boat. But not a soul could they see.

Finally the raft came to a point opposite them, and then drifted on past, silent, and to all appearances deserted.

Polar Sol now suggested that two of their party follow along the shore under cover, and watch the float, while the other two follow them with the horses. As some one supposed to be known to Rivers was aboard the boat, it was necessary that he be one of the party to follow the craft, and so he and Polar set out, leaving Dismal and Congo to bring up the horses.

As the great boat was moved only by the will of the current, its progress was slow, and those following had no difficulty in keeping it in sight.

The noon hour had long since passed, but the

hunters and their friends had been too busy to even think of eating. They kept on until the sun was low. Evening shadows were gathering in the woods and stretching out over the river. It began to look as if darkness would close around the raft without the pursuers having caught the glimpse of a single person on board. And, to their further disappointment, they finally found their advance checked by a large creek flowing into the river from the west. When they reached it, however, they were a few rods in advance of the raft. From where they stood they could see down the creek across the river. The setting sun hanging in line with the narrow lane in the forest made by the creek, threw a vivid bar of light down the opening and across the river.

"I reckon we'll git our last view o' the raft to-day from this point, captain," Polar Sol observed.

"Yes, and I wish it would cross that lingering bar of light before the sun gets behind the tree-tops," replied the captain. "I do not suppose the boat will tie up for the night, for it is not at all likely those aboard it have anything to fear from the Indians— Ah! there it goes, now!"

True enough, the prow of the craft had appeared in the narrow band of light stretching across the river, and as it crept across this line, and the rear drifted into view, a subdued cry suddenly burst from the two men's lips, for they beheld, standing out in plain view, a young woman, around whose shoulders was thrown a light shawl.

She could not have been over twenty years of age. Her head was bare, and as the golden sunlight fell full upon her, it revealed a vision of loveliness—a face radiant with sublime beauty.

"Great Heavens!" cried Rivers, starting forward as if to pursue the vision of loveliness into the shadows.

But Polar Sol, grasping him by the arm, arrested his movements, saying:

"Easy, captain! Do you know her?"

Rivers made no answer, but continued to gaze after the vision on the raft like one transfixed.

Sol turned his eyes from the captain's face to the boat, but already the craft had drifted into the shadows, the sun had dropped behind the distant tree-tops, and the stillness of death reigned for a moment.

Then the sound of light footsteps was heard, and the two men, quickly turning about, found themselves face to face with an odd and curious-looking specimen of humanity.

CHAPTER III.

THE SILENT SLAYER.

WITHOUT a word, Captain Rivers gave the stranger a contemptuous look, then turned and looked out across the river.

But Polar Sol gave his attention to the intruder, saying:

"Sword o' Gideon! what for a contraption is this?"

The stranger was a man of perhaps fifty years, small of stature, with a short neck set between round, "humped" shoulders, a shrewd, cunning, weasel face, a little snakish eye, and a sharp, hawk-bill nose.

On his back he carried a large bundle tied up in oiled canvas, and at a glance Sol knew by this that he was one of those pack-peddlers occasionally met with in the border settlements and Indian villages.

"How do, strangers," the man said, as he dropped his pack to the ground, and, removing his cap, mopped his sweltering brow with it; "fearful hot evenin', ar'n't it? Glad to meet somebody, swear I am. My name's Peter Zull, and I'm a peddler, I am—on my way to the Ingin village."

"Wal, Peter," exclaimed Sol, "what in the deuce you landin' here for? Why don't you travel in a boat? or git you a hoss?"

"Started out on a mule," replied the peddler, "but second night out lost it, and pulled for'd afoot. I've had a roarin' ole tramp, but five hundred per cent. profit on the goods in that pack are a ferocious stimulant for a man's system."

"Is that your profit on goods?"

"'Bout that—more, if any difference, if I strike the red-skins afore the fur-traders gits 'round and stocks the market. I take all in furs and sell them for hard coin to the traders when they come. What d'ye see, stranger?"

The question was addressed to Captain Rivers, who still stood gazing in deep thought out over the river.

"I see nothing," was Rivers's laconic reply.

"A strange craft just went past; did you see it, Peter?" asked Polar.

"No; what was it like?"

Old Sol told him.

By this time the shadows of night began to thicken around them, and Old Dismal and Congo having made their appearance, the party concluded to go into camp for the night, and a suitable spot was at once selected for the purpose. Then the pack-horses were unloaded and a shelter-tent, large enough to accommodate half a dozen, was pitched under a tree at the edge of a thicket extending back to the creek. The tent was lighted with a small pocket-lantern which the captain carried.

Peter Zull was invited to stop over night with them, but for some time he seemed undecided as to whether he should accept or not; finally he shouldered his pack and concluded to go on. Again Old Polar invited him to stop with them, and this time the invitation was given more like an imperative command than a request, and without another word the peddler threw down his pack and seated himself within the tent.

To Old Dismal, if not the peddler himself, it was plain to be seen that Polar Sol was suspicious of the man.

A sumptuous and highly-relished supper was made off Captain Rivers's supplies, after which Congo was sent out to keep watch over the horses, while the others, including Peter, the peddler, remained seated in the tent in conversation, though Polar Sol and Old Dismal did most of the talking.

Captain Rivers had little to say. He seemed in deep thought most of the time, and the expression that occasionally swept over his face told that a fierce struggle was going on within his breast. Sol felt almost certain that Rivers half mistrusted the secret connected with the mysterious raft. His actions at the time they caught a glimpse of the fair girl, convinced him of this, although the wondrous beauty of the maiden was enough to have turned the head of even as old and unromantic a sinner as himself. He waited for some time in hopes the captain would answer the quest on he put to him regarding the girl, just as Peter Zull appeared upon the scene.

"Captain," the hunter finally said, "I thought you recognized that girl at first; how is it?"

"I thought so myself, at first," Rivers replied; "and yet a second thought convinced me that I was wrong; the woman I first took her to be is more than a thousand miles from here. Let me show you her picture."

As he concluded, the young officer took a photograph from a leathern case and handed it to Sol. Holding the picture so that the light fell upon it, the hunter gazed upon it with a light of admiration beaming in his eyes. It was the picture of a fair and beautiful young woman.

Peter Zull, who had been a quiet listener, now thrust his head out from between his shoulders—stretching out his neck in a way, and to an extent, that was phenomenal, and peered over Sol's shoulder at the picture. A single glance seemed to satisfy him, and he drew back his head between his shoulders as a snail withdraws into its shell. Captain Rivers could not help noticing him—not so much on account of his actions, as the expression that swept over his weasel-like face.

For several moments Polar Sol gazed at the picture, as if mentally comparing it with the face he had seen on the raft.

"She's a pestiferous beautiful gal, captain," he finally said; "but I can't say as to her resemblance to the gal on the raft, for I only got a glimpse o' the latter. I see'd she war an angel, but that's all I could say 'bout her. But 'pose she was the original o' this picture, captain, what do you know 'bout her?"

"If she whom we saw upon that raft," replied Rivers, "is the original of this picture, then she is my wife!"

"Sword o' Gideon!" exclaimed Polar Sol.

"Whew!" whistled Peter, the peddler.

"Then it war no wonder you war excited when you see'd her," declared Old Dismal; "but why should she be here? If it war your wife, surely you'd recognized her beyond a doubt."

"Yes," piped in Zull, with an attempt to be facetious; "it's generally s'posed a man's acquainted with his wife!"

"I was not expecting her here," Rivers went on, "and I only got a glimpse of the woman on the boat. Near y ten months ago I was married in Ohio to Miss Irene Hanlon, of Kentucky. I was at home on a furlough and she was visiting with a schoolmate in the neighborhood. I remained with my young wife three or four weeks after our marriage; then I returned to my command and she to her father's home. I intended to resign my commission at once, but failed in having it accepted until recently. Meanwhile, I have heard from my wife fre-

quently, and had hoped to be with her soon. If that is my wife, on the raft there, she is the victim of some foul conspiracy or cruelty."

"Have you any grounds on which to base any suspicion, captain?" asked Polar Sol.

For a moment Rivers was silent, but finally said:

"Yes; our marriage was a private one—some would call it a secret one. There were no witnesses to it but Irene's school friend, Joe Danvers, the parson who officiated, and God. Irene's father was set upon her marrying a wealthy Dr. Tomas Victor, a Spanish gentleman more than twice as old as she. It was to forestall this act of parental cruelty that we were married when we were. Perhaps we did wrng, but we did not think so, nor do I yet, under the circumstances. The last time I heard from my wife she wrote me that she had told her father of our marriage, but said nothing of how he received the news; but she urged me to get home as soon as possible, and this made me think she did not tell all. I would have taken her with me had I known I must remain away so long; but one cannot foresee the disappointments before them, and if it should prove that the woman aboard that raft is my wife, and a hair of her head is harmed, by the heaven above us the guilty ones will pay most dearly for it!"

"That's the proper talk, captain," declared old Polar, "and I'm sadly mistaken if you ar'n't the man to back up your words with work. Young folks sometimes makes some bad breaks, especially in love affairs; but then that don't justify old folks in makin' Mosaic fools o' themselves and in rippin' up the universe. I don't blame you and the gal a bit for headin' off that old Spanish buccaneer, Victor, and the gal's dad, who must be wantin' in parental love. But, say, cap'n, did Joe Danvers know the father of your wife?"

"Yes," replied Rivers, "an' the fact of Joe's recognizin' the man on the boat—although he was slain before he could speak his name—is the strongest circumstantial evidence in the whole matter of my wife being on board that raft with her father."

"And if it war Hanlon, then them shots were intended for you—as divorce percedin's, as it war. But it don't seem probable at all, even tho' possible."

"Cap'n," suddenly exclaimed Peter Zull, rubbing his hands together in a gleeful way, and looking up into Rivers's face, "what'll you give me to find out whether that woman's your wife or not? I'm on the make. Money's my god, and I'll risk almost any danger to increase the size of my idol. Make me a fat, juicy offer and I'll board that craft afore mornin' and bring the information you want. I've seen service as a spy—a detective in my younger days and I hain't forgot my cunnin' yit."

"Juan Alvar!"

This name was pronounced by a strange voice—invisible lips. And yet it seemed uttered within the tent. The four men heard it distinctly. Zull started and gazed from one to the other of his companions, fairly alarmed. All were puzzled, and the profound silence that followed was suddenly broken by the mysterious voice again saying:

"Juan Alvar!"

Zull's face now assumed a look of absolute terror. His teeth fairly chattered. His hands trembled. He glanced at the faces around him, and then, reaching out, he pulled aside the flap that closed the entrance to the tent and thrust his head outside as if to search the darkness for the unseen speaker. As he did so, the captain and the hunters saw something flash across the opening; they heard a dull blow, a gasp and whistling gurgle. At the same instant they saw the body of the peddler leap forward and fall prostrate upon his face, half out of the tent, the flap of the tent dropping back to its place over him. A convulsive quiver agitated his legs, and, believing the man had fallen in a fit of terror, Old Dismal seized him by the feet and dragged him into the tent. But to their horror they saw that the head did not come with the body; but that blood was spurting from the arteries of the neck where, like a noiseless guillotine, the sword of an unseen foe—the sword of a Damocles—had, at a single blow, severed the head from the trunk!

CHAPTER IV.

THE FACE OF AN IMP.

AGAIN was Polar Sol and his friends fairly shocked by the presence of death. The sudden, silent and mysterious beheading of Peter Zull, the peddler, filled their minds with horror, and for several moments they sat motionless, spell-bound by the shocking sight before them. Old

Polar Sol was the first to move. Grasping his revolver, he sprung to his feet, saying:

"An assassin lurks in the shadows! I will crucify him!"

He rushed from the tent without a fear of the foe who had slain the peddler, but outside he found all was darkness. He peered into the gloom around him—he listened. He saw nothing—he heard nothing save the dreary, monotonous moan of the wilderness.

"Say, you cowardly, nocturnal assassin!" he at length called out, "show yourself and I'll shoot the kidneys outen you, you prowlin' hyena! Come forth from your hidin', and buck the Cold Wave from 'Scatka—flip an' slosh your battle-ax 'bout the neck o' a Roman legion as ye did that poor ole peddler, and I'll tunnel your liver—"

"Say, Polar Sol," came the voice of Old Dismal from the tent, "bang that lip o' yourn shet! You're narvous, man, as a willow in the wind; come in here outen the damp air afore your ole top-knot's clipped off."

"You come out, Dismal, and we'll charge this woods with fixed bagonets," responded the fearless Sol. "I don't perpose to have all our heads shot off, and shaved off by sneakin' assassins! Swaller down your timid, flutterin' heart, Dismal, gird up yer lions, thou valorious knight o' Deer Lodge, and come forth to battle."

Old Dismal emerged from the tent admonishing Sol to be silent. Captain Rivers also came out, and the three made a careful search for the assassin, but without success. The silent slayer had disappeared as quietly as he had come and done his deadly work.

Dismal went out to where Congo was watching the horses. He found the faithful darky at his post, totally ignorant of the tragedy at camp.

The body of Zull was removed outside the tent and covered with boughs.

Old Dismal concluded to remain in the woods on guard for an hour or so at least.

Sol and Rivers returned to the tent, and seating themselves, discussed the death of the peddler and the probable cause for it. While thus engaged, the captain's eyes suddenly became fixed on something at the end of the tent opposite the entrance. Old Sol's eyes quickly sought the object of the officer's startled gaze, and they fell upon a sight that filled his brain with amazement, if not his breast with sudden fear.

Near the bottom of the tent was a slit in the canvas about fifteen inches long. This slit stood agape, and in the opening was inserted a horrible-looking face, but whether of human or beast he could not tell. It appeared to be a black face, and from the circumstances under which it was seen, it seemed of hideous conformation. They could see a double row of white teeth grinning at them; and a flat nose, and a pair of great, wild, rolling eyes surrounded with white rings like the rings of Saturn.

"Sword o' Gideon!" cried the hunter, fumbling for his pistol; "what in the name o' Africa's that?"

As he spoke, the unknown creature appeared to wink with one of its Saturn-ringed eyes, skew up one corner of its gorilla-like mouth, and, with a short, sharp "*queak! queak!*" disappear from the slit in the canvas.

In a second Polar was up and out of the tent, almost running over Old Dismal with whom he collided in his headlong rush into the darkness. He ran around the tent and listened. He heard something retreating through the thicket toward the river and started in pursuit. He was not far from the stream when he heard a plunge into the water. He ran to the edge of the bank and peered up and down the stream, but it was so dark he could see nothing. He could hear the waves chafing the beach, and the faint strokes of something swimming. He fired a shot in the direction the sound seemed to come from, but with no known result.

For several moments the hunter stood still listening, and finally his ears were greeted by a hoarse, disinal sound, like the "*youk, youk, youk*" of a sea-lion. It came from the opposite side of the river, but whether from human or animal lips he knew not.

"Wal, by the sword o' Gideon!" mentally exclaimed Sol; "if that don't stump the Cold Wave, I don't know whatever did. I'll be gol-swizzled if this isn't the peskiest country I ever struck—the assassins, and demons, and pirates don't give a feller a chance to strike a lick. And if thar's sich a critter as the Imp o' Night infestin' this Red River latitude, I've beheld the beast!"

Having thus expressed his feelings to himself, Polar returned to the tent. Old Dismal accosted him with the question:

"Pard, has the spell worked off?"

"I'd say *spell*, if I war you, Dismal, when you'd stand here like a dead pine and let the Imp o' Darkness crawl past you, and poke his mug into the tent and make faces at the Cold Wave! I follered the critter to the river, into which it jumped and swum off. A few minutes later I heard its croupy bark on t'other side of the stream, and I'll be plagued if I ar'n't wuss bum-fuzzled over to-night's preceedin's 'n a hull insane asylum!"

"And d'you know, Sol, that just since you left the tent, another man—a stranger—has put in his appearance?"

"No!"

"Yes; I turned him over to the captain. Mebby he can throw some light on the things that have scrambled your brain."

"I'll bet he's the man that bounced Zull's head off. Let's go in and interview him."

So saying, the bordermen entered the tent.

The stranger was seated and conversing with Rivers. He was a man of five-and-forty years, or thereabouts. His face was covered with a short, bushy beard. He had small, dark eyes, and a flat but crooked nose. His general appearances were not such as would impress one favorably. That he was a Frenchman, or of French descent, Sol knew at a glance. He had given his name as Pierre Grevy, and by this name was he introduced to Sol and Dismal. He seemed in a very sad and downcast mood when the hunters entered, for Rivers was just telling him of the mysterious murder of Zull, the peddler; and when the borderers had been seated, he said:

"This is very sad news to me, for Peter Zull was a friend o' mine. I have been expecting him for long time at the Indian village. I come with canoe to meet him at mouth of the creek yender."

"How did you know he'd be here?" asked Polar Sol.

"Ah! that's easy to know," replied Grevy. "An Injun runner come in to-day at noon, and tell me the peddler come."

This answer was not at all satisfactory to Polar Sol. He did not say so, but it was easy to be seen in the expression of his mobile countenance. In fact, Sol did not, from the first, like the looks of Grevy, and after he had heard his story of the Indian runner, he made up his mind the fellow was telling a deliberate falsehood to get possession of Zull's pack.

"Mr. Gravy," he finally asked, "what war the peddler's real name?"

"Peter Zull," answered the man.

"That's what he told us; but hadn't he another name?"

"Not that I knows, but he might 'a' had."

"How long have you known him?"

"Three—four, yes, five years; and as I am his b st friend I have a right to take his pack," replied the fellow.

"Yes," responded Old Polar, with a look of distrust, "you would have providin' you didn't kill him to obtain possession o' it."

"Me kill my friend?" exclaimed the stranger, his eyes flashing with a look of rage that convinced the hunter he was not a coward—a man that could be insulted with impunity.

"That's what I said, edzactly," responded Sol, calmly; "but you'd as well keep cool 'bout it, Mr. Soup-Gravy. If you're innocent you'll have a chance to prove it, I reckon."

"Polar Sol!" Grevy exclaimed, his face white with rage, "I am not the man that can be insulted by even you. You must retract your words or back them with your life!"

The Frenchman drew a knife as he spoke.

"Mr. Gravy," retorted Polar Sol, grasping his revolver, "I can back a hull sewin'-society of words."

The next instant, in all probability, the two men would have been engaged in a deadly conflict had they not been deterred by a strange voice, saying:

"Hold, men! It was this blade, wielded by this arm, that slew Juan Alvar!"

The voice seemed to come from over them, and dropping their hands at their sides and lifting their eyes, the foes beheld—suspended above and between them, like the sword of Damocles—a long, slender blade of glittering steel clutched in a hand that was thrust into the tent through a slit in the canvas!

CHAPTER V.

TAMARAC TOM, THE BIG TRAPPER BOY.

AN exclamation of surprise burst from the lips of the four men in the tent when they beheld the murderous blade of Zull's self-accused slayer hanging above them. A look of horror swept over the face of Grevy. He sat like one para-

lyzed; as if expecting the sword to descend upon him, and yet unable to move.

Polar Sol took in the situation at a glance, and would have believed the unseen swordsman a confederate of Grevy's had he not seen that the latter's sudden fear was genuine.

But only for a brief moment did the sword remain suspended over them, and yet, before any one moved, it was withdrawn.

Then, with a cry like that of a wounded beast, the Frenchman darted from the tent in search of the unknown.

Polar Sol and Dismal, also, hurried out into the night to aid in the search. They were gone nearly an hour, and when they returned they were no wiser than before. They had seen or heard nothing of the silent slayer.

Grevy had not yet returned, nor did he ever come, much to the disappointment of Polar Sol, who wished to apologize for the wrong he had done the man, who was not a coward, whatever he might otherwise be.

Polar Sol and his old pard took turns in keeping watch over the tent the remainder of the night, determined that no further surprises by silent and mysterious beings should occur; and their vigilance carried them safely through without further visitations or disturbances, until morning dawn relieved them.

Congo, the captain's faithful servant, reported at camp at daylight as having passed a quiet and pleasant night with the horses about forty rods from camp in a little grassy glade.

Breakfast was soon dispatched and preparations to start in pursuit of the rafts speedily made. The body of the trader was buried, his pack and the other effects loaded upon the horses, and the journey began.

Polar Sol crossed the mouth of the creek on some driftwood and proceeded alone down the river, while the others, to get over with the animals, were to proceed about three miles up the creek, effect a crossing, and then make for a certain point on the north side of a large sheet of water known as Lake-of-Isles, where Sol was to meet them.

When the party broke camp the sun was two hours high. Not a breath of air was stirring yet a coolness pervaded the forest that was rife with the invigorating odor of the pines; and with the elastic step of youth Polar Sol pursued his way down the river revolving in his mind the complication of stirring events and strange things he had witnessed in the past twenty-four hours.

It had been several years since the old borderman had been so far down the Red River. The abundance of game further south had enabled him to work within a certain limit for years. He knew, however, the exact location of the Indian village—that it was not far away, and that he was liable at any time to meet with red-skins. It had been rumored that Indians were on the war-path, and it was to ascertain the truth or falsity of this that he and Dismal had visited these parts by request of the settlers up the river.

After traveling about five miles, the hunter came to a creek that he knew to be the outlet from Lake-of-Isles, and crossing it, he turned and followed it up to the lake which was a little over a mile from the river.

Lake-of-Isles, or Dotted Lake, as it was called by some, was an irregular-shaped body of water of nearly two thousand acres in area. It was dotted with islands varying in size from one to ten rods square. In places the smaller islands lay in clusters, and these all being covered with a dense growth of pines that interlaced their branches over the narrow lanes of water, presented, from a bird's-eye view, the appearance of one large island. From one side of the lake the other could not be seen for the island-forests, and it was only from an elevated position that lanes of water could be seen here and there, at all.

Polar Sol was moving along the lake toward the designated point of meeting. A long narrow glade lay before him with a single, stately tree standing in the center. He had almost reached one end of the opening when he suddenly discovered a female figure walking to and fro beneath the tree. Stepping back, the old hunter took a position behind some bushes in the deep shadows where he could not be seen, and watched the maiden, for such she evidently was. She could not have been over eighteen years. She was a white girl, yet dressed in the garb of an Indian maiden. Her long, dark-brown hair hung in double braids at her back. Her brow was wreathed with a glittering head-dress that gave her an air of queenly grace. Her frock was short, her limbs and feet being incased in fancifully wrought leeggings and moccasins. Her

bare, plump arms and fair neck were resplendent with jewels. A light shawl of vivid colors lay carelessly about her shoulders and willowy, graceful form.

It was quite evident that the maiden was there upon some extraordinary occasion, and was in her holiday attire. To Polar Sol she appeared the very picture of beauty and grace, and as he stood feasting his eyes upon her, he mused:

"Sword o' Gideon! a white gal in Injin goods, and I'll swear she's a screamin' pretty critter! I've hearn o' wood-nymphs, and sich, and if there be sich things, she's the queen o' the flock. But Old Dismal alers said I war an ole ejioth 'bout gals—that every one I see'd war an angel for beauty, and mebbly I have a weakness that way, but it's no bad fault. But, what for a gol-swizzled country is this, anyhow? Last night imps and slayers stalked abroad in this wood, and with day comes fairies and birds and—but, sugar! what's the use? That gal's there to meet some one—a lover, I'll go a beaver-skin. Thunder and tornadoes! if I war just 'bout a century younger, I'd sail into that glade like a Roman conquest and demolish that little doe's heart. But, poor old fool that I am! I war born too early in the beginnin' o' the Christian Era ever to make an impression on that gal's—"

"Well, old pard, what's the matter? Are you afraid to advance?"

It was a strange voice that spoke thus, and turning with a half-guilty look upon his face, Polar Sol found himself confronted by a tall and powerful youth of perhaps twenty years. Over six feet high, and proportionately built, he was a veritable young giant, with a handsome, manly face, a sparkling brown eye, and the air of a daring, dashing youth. He was dressed in the garb of a border hunter, and carried a rifle, hunting-knife, and a pair of revolvers. His face, however, bore the red marks of recent violence, and his clothing was torn in places and speckled with blood-stains.

Polar Sol recognized him at a glance, and advancing toward him with outstretched hand, he exclaimed:

"Tamarac Tom, the Big Boy Trapper, or I'm a Turk!"

"Right you are, Polar Solomon," the young giant responded, "and I'm truly glad to meet you."

"But what 've you been doin', Tom? You look as though you'd been foolin' with a b'ar, or a Cold Wave?"

"A racy old fight with a pack of four Ingins this morning is what ails me," was the boy's response.

"The Satan, you say? Then the red devils are really on the war-path? How did you come out, Tom?"

"Well, I came out alive," answered the boy with a smile, "and that's more'n I can say for the red-skins, though I tell you they made me flutter around for awhile. But if ever you seen red-skins splattered over onorganized territory it war them four bucks. They acted as though they wanted to take me a prisoner at first, and before they found out I was loaded, they were not in a shape to perform with a knife or hatchet. But, Polar, you must excuse me for a few minutes for I have come here to meet that young girl in the glade yonder."

"Ah, Tom Pope, you lucky dog!" the old man exclaimed; "then you're her lover—ye needn't blush, nor stammer, nor lie 'bout it, Tamarac. But it's well you got 'long when you did, for I had just 'bout made up my mind to prance in there, capture her heart and fly with her to Rome. She's an angel, Tom, in moccasins, but before you go tell me who she is?"

"Her true name is Naidee Bondon—her Indian name, 'June.'"

"Then she lives with the Indians?"

"Yes, but she is a white girl. Her father was an American, her mother a Frenchwoman. Some years ago her father died and her mother came to live with a brother, who, having married a daughter of the chief, Crow Wing, lives with the Indians and is a trader. I first met June in the Indian village, where I was always a welcome visitor, two years ago. But finally I was forbidden to enter the village again under penalty of death. This was a startlin' surprise to me, but I soon learned from June the cause of it: I had a rival in one Carl Costello, a fellow claimin' to be a Cuban, and a friend of the Medicine-Man who is, himself, a Spaniard. Cuban or not, June detested him, but he secured the influence of the chief to keep me away from the village and June; but since then we have managed to see each other by meeting in the forest."

"That's the proper grit, boy!" exclaimed

Sol. "But say, Tom, I guess you've got another rival—see that?"

He pointed to a dark-visaged man who had appeared from the woods on the north and was walking straight toward the maiden.

Sol saw the young trapper's face change color and his hand drop nervously to his revolver.

"Do you know him, Tom?"

"Yes: it is the Cuban, Carl Costello!"

"Oh, the deuce! shall I drop him?" and Old Sol raised his rifle.

"Wait a moment, but watch, and if he offers violence to her let him have it," replied the youth. "The scoundrel has dogged her footsteps here."

The Cuban was within twenty feet of the maiden before she discovered his presence, and as she started back in surprise, he doffed his hat and bowed low to her.

"Oh, mercy!" exclaimed Old Sol, sarcastically, "he's politer'n a hull French reception. Whew! don't he stack it on majesticly? Don't he warp and weave 'bout like a willer in the wind? But the gal don't act as tho' she 'preciated the Cubanistic sweetness o' the darned fool."

It was quite evident to the watchers that June was surprised by the Cuban's presence, for as he advanced toward her, she slowly retreated. They could not hear what was said for they were fully seventy-five yards away.

Costello continued in his advance, and when he saw that June manifested a fear of him, he said:

"My fair young lady, I hope you will have no fears of me. True, I am surprised, and yet delighted to meet you here in this charming spot. But you are brave to come here alone by the Lake-of-Isles, for is it not known that here dwells the Evil Spirit of the Lake? that in these woods 'round and about roams, day and night, a hideous, black imp?"

"Carl Costello," replied June, indignantly, "there is no evil spirit hereabouts except that which prompted you to follow me here! Begone! I detest you!"

The words seemed to sting the Cuban to the quick, and determined to crush the girl's haughty, defiant spirit at a blow, he responded:

"Miss June, you think I do not know *why* you are here, but be undeceived at once. I knew that you were to meet Tom Pope here to-day, but let me inform you that Tom will not be here for a party of four warriors went to intercept him at his usual crossing on the river. That is why *he* is not here, and the reason why *I* am! I now stand without a rival, and you will gain nothing by further obstinacy."

"Coward! assassin!" hissed the girl; "do not approach me!"

"But I will—you must go with me!" he replied, and started toward her as if to seize her.

Old Polar saw his movements and quickly threw his rifle to his shoulder, but instantly lowered it again, exclaiming:

"Good Lord! what's that whirlin' 'cross the glade?"

Tom made no reply but fixed his gaze upon the object alluded to like one rendered suddenly dumb. Out of the woods across the glade, directly toward the man and maiden, they saw something whirling along the ground end over end with the rapidity, almost, of lightning.

The Cuban had, also, seen it approaching and, starting back, grasped his pistol, but before he could use it the unknown object struck him square in the stomach and doubled him up like a jack-knife on the earth.

Tamarac Tom and Polar Sol now dashed from their concealment and ran toward the scene of excitement.

The maiden, as if paralyzed with terror at what had taken place, stood motionless in her tracks, but when she saw Tom Pope coming toward her, she uttered a cry of joy and ran to meet the lover whom Costello had told her would never come. And while the young trapper gave his entire attention to the maiden, Polar Sol gave his to the Cuban who still lay curled up motionless on the earth, and from whose side there suddenly sprang erect a diminutive human figure with a woolly head, a black face and great staring white eyes!

"Sword o' Gideon!" burst from Polar's lips, as he stopped short and glared at the figure, "if it ar'n't an imp I'll never see one!"

"Ki-yi!" half-laughed, half-barked the black Lilliputian; "I guess you's 'fraid ob me, massa."

"Well, what kind o' a contraption are ye?" asked Sol; "be you a boy, imp, or what?"

"I'se nothin' but a boy, and not much ob one neither; and you guessed my name fus' pop. Imp's my name, and I'se a black kid as what can butt de horns off a goat. Oh, golly! but if I didn't give dat feller a whang in de stomick

dat make him curl up sick like he'd been taken wid de crumps. Say, massa, d' you kno, it was me dat peeked into yoah tent last night?"

Old Sol looked upon the little black specimen of humanity with wonder and curiosity. The boy was nearly, if not quite a full-blooded African. He looked as though he was but ten or twelve years of age, but was no doubt sixteen or seventeen. He had a lithe, supple figure that could have been but little over four feet high. He had an enormous mouth, a wide, flat nose and a big white eye made larger by a way he had of "staring." The wool upon his round bullet head was cropped close to the skull. His head, feet, and legs to the thighs, were bare.

The boy seemed restless as a captive deer as he stood before the hunter. His big, white eyes roamed restlessly around him like one accustomed to constant dangers. He would turn around and around, stand first on one foot and then the other, all the time working his fingers in a nervous way. He was all suppleness and activity and involuntarily cut some antics that forced a smile to the hunters lips. And, finally a groan from the lips of the reviving Cuban caused the lad to assume an attitude and expression so comical that Sol could no longer restrain an outburst of laughter.

"Tom Pope," the hunter exclaimed, "excuse my interruption, but for the Lord's sake come this way! I've struck the biggest little picnic this side o' the moon—a hull Roman holiday—a colored camp-meetin'—a comic concert!"

"I've seen that lad before, and heard of him often," responded Tom, who with June advanced toward them. "That is Imp, the Elf of the Woods."

"He's a toy tempest," declared Old Sol, "and the way he struck that gentleman is a caution—"

"Oh, massas!" suddenly broke in the little black-skin excitedly, stretching out his hands and working his fingers nervously, "run for youah lives! dar come whole gob ob sabbages!"

Scarcely had these words of warning been uttered when a wild, savage yell resounded through the forest, and no less than five-and-twenty Indians burst from the woods at the point where Sol and Tom had entered the glade, and dashed toward the whites like so many infuriated demons!

CHAPTER VI.

THE DUEL IN THE FOREST.

"COME, Tom!" cried Polar Sol, "hurry on into the timber with your gal, and I'll do my best to cover your retreat! Quick, boy! for there's murder in the red devils' hearts!"

The Boy Trapper took June by the hand, and hurried toward the woods whither Imp, the Elf of the Woods, had preceded them.

To Polar Sol's surprise the Cuban rose to his feet as the red-skins came up, and, frantic with impotent rage, urged on the warriors in pursuit of the fugitives. But the hunter kept close behind the young couple, a revolver in his right hand and his rifle in the left, a look of resolute courage and determination upon his face. He did not wish to fire the first shot until absolutely compelled to—until he saw there was no hopes of averting a conflict, although there would be little hope for him and Tom against such odds. They could have escaped all dangers, perhaps, had they left June behind, as she begged them to do, and sought safety in flight. But as the maiden had previously expressed a determination never to return to the Indian village, her gallant lover resolved to stay by her as long as he had life to defend her.

Two of the pursuing savages, fleetest than their friends, were pressing close upon Polar Sol with uplifted tomahawks before they had quite reached the timber, and the hunter saw that he must strike, and turned to open the conflict. But it was not for him to fire the first shot, for as he faced the foe, a rifle in the woods behind him cracked, and the nearest savage fell shot through the heart, while the other checked his speed to await the coming of his friends. Again turning his back to the enemy, Old Sol ran on into the woods where he met Old Dismal, Captain Rivers, and the negro, Congo, weapons in hand ready for battle.

Tamarac Tom, having reached the cover of the woods, bade his sweetheart run on into the forest and conceal herself until danger was past, while he returned to the assistance of his friends.

To the young man's surprise, however, all was quiet when he reached them. The savages had all halted about three rods from the edge of the woods after the shot from Dismal's rifle had laid one of their number lifeless, and called aloud to the whites not to shoot. Then their leader, a

large and powerful man, evidently a half-breed, armed with a huge and ancient-looking sword, stepped to the front of the savage line and said:

"Men, we do not want to fight, though we are many and you are few. We are here to avenge only a single wrong."

"Answer for us, Sol," said Old Dismal, "for if that's any diplomatic lyin' to be did, as well as fightin', you've the faculties for every emergency; unlimber, Polar, and open on 'em."

"Wal, seems to me ye changed yer notion quite suddenly, didn't ye, 'bout fightin'?" Sol at once replied to the big foe. "I reckon ye didn't know that was a masked battery in the woods here when you come bulgin' arter us so wolfishish, did ye? Reckon ye didn't know Old Dismal, the booby-faced deestroyer war nestled in here like a Roman legion in a swamp, nor that you war crowdin' on Polar Sol, the Cold Wave from 'Scatka, nor Big Tom Pope, a freshly-forged thunderbolt from Olympus?"

"Tom Pope is the fellow we're after, and no other," responded the big half-breed.

"Is that so?" returned Sol. "Wal, Tom's a much-sought-after chap; even the gals are after Tom. Tom flourishes well in these parts, I see; popular as the itch in an Indian village. But why d'ye want Tom and none o' the rest o' us? That's a v'riety o' us here with scalps in all stages o' ripeness and brilliancy o' plumage."

"Tom Pope, the Big Pine, must answer for the death of four of Crow Wing's warriors he murdered in cold blood this mornin'," declared the renegade in a very emphatic manner.

"Them as what waylaid him and got their kidneys all mussed up, eh?" replied Sol.

"The murder of them warriors was without provocation; and if you would avert a general uprising of the Indians, you will deliver up Big Pine for punishment."

"S'pose I'm willin' an' Tom isn't?—or s'pose we all kick?"

"Then you will all have to take the consequences. But if what I have heard of Polar Sol is true, he is not such a fool as to stand up against five to one," returned the big renegade.

"Yes, I be, colonel," replied Sol; "the older I grow the bigger fool I git to be about fightin', and seein' as me and my party are all Old Masters with knife, sword and pistol, we've no reason to fear you, nor give up Big Pine 'cause he see'd fit to save his life by killin' four o' your cut-throats. Now, jist you figger up that if Tom Pope could polish off four red-skins afore breakfast alone, what show your little band 'd have in a fight with we five consolidated and robust bull-walruses. Why, man, you're frivolous as a spring-lamb 'round a wolf's den."

"I say, Polar Sol!" exclaimed the red-skins' leader, becoming nettled by the hunter's words, "I would have you know that I'm not a fool nor a coward. You evidently take me for what I am not. Sir, my father was a gallant French naval officer, and my mother an English lady, and those races are not races of cowards."

"Pedigree first-rate, captain," Old Sol answered, "but then we're all Star-spangled-banner Americans, born to the tune o' Yankee Doodle, and are down on the herd-book as Jersey-bullians on the fight. Tom Pope, or any man on this side o' the timber are a better man than you be with fist, knife, sword or pistol, by thunder!"

"Say!" cried the big renegade, flourishing his sword above his head, "since you have thus boasted, I challenge you or any one of your crowd to meet me half-way between our friends with your choice o' weepens, and if I'm whipped no further demands 'll be made of you. Now come on—any one of you, and display your boasted skill and strength!"

"Gentlemen, I will respond to that challenge!"

It was a strange voice that spoke thus, and turning to a dense clump of bushes whence it came, Polar Sol and his friends saw step therefrom, a long, slender sword in hand, a man who was a total stranger to every one of them. He was a man of forty or forty-five years of age, tall and slender, with a dignified and soldierly bearing. His head was bare, and his thin dark hair thrown carelessly back from a high, intellectual forehead. His face was covered with a long full beard. He wore no coat nor vest. The collar of his blue flannel shirt lay open, exposing a full, hairy chest.

As the stranger stepped from the bushes, he gave each of the astonished faces before him a sweeping glance, and, without pausing, advanced with fearless step toward the renegade, saying, in a clear, sonorous voice:

"Come, Sir Son of a Frenchman, and I will test the mettle of your blade, and the skill of your arm."

Polar Sol and his friends had been so completely astounded by the sudden appearance of the stranger and his deliberate actions, that before they could speak or interpose any objections to his accepting the renegade's challenge, he was out in the glade. But all had occurred in a moment. Old Dismal was the first to speak.

"Polar," he said, "my life on it that that man is the mysterious assassin of Peter Zull, the peddler!"

"Men," spoke up Tamarac Tom, a little excited; "I cannot allow that man to fight my battles—I shall recall him!"

But Tom was too late, for the big renegade, not knowing but that the soldierly man was one of the hunters' party, advanced to meet him, and as the last word fell from the Boy Trapper's lips, his ears were greeted by the clash of the duelists' swords.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ISLE OF REFUGE.

"STAND to your arms, men!" commanded Polar Sol, as the clash of the combatants' steel smote upon his ears, "and see that our friend is not interfered with by the savages!"

But already the revolvers of the whites were in hand ready for instant use. The hunters had little faith in the savages standing their ground, idle spectators, until the duel was ended; but it was soon observed that they maintained a coolness that could only have come of their perfect confidence in the ability of their leader to vanquish his foe.

Even the hunters and the captain, when they looked upon the slender figure of their strange friend and that of the powerful renegade, almost trembled for the fate of the former. But they soon discovered that the stranger was no novice in the use of the sword; and yet it seemed, as he skillfully parried the desperate blows of the foe, that his slender sword must be snapped in two by his antagonist's heavy blade. But the stranger seemed to know the mettle of his sword, and with his left hand lying in the hollow of his back, his right whirled and flashed the glittering steel in the face of the renegade.

Clash! clang! clang! rung the terrible blades, the forest echoes repeating the sounds in clear, metallic notes. The apparent ease with which the stranger met and thwarted the desperate lunges and blows of his adversary soon convinced Captain Rivers, who was himself no mean swordsman, that he was playing with the Frenchman, and in a low tone said to Polar Sol:

"Polar, that stranger is an expert. He's merely toying with that big renegade, who thinks he is keeping him all the while on the defense. The foe is no mean swordsman, but I look for a *coup de grace* on the part of the stranger pretty soon that will astonish that impetuous fellow."

Scarcely had this prediction been made ere a cry of pain escaped the Frenchman's lips, and his sword fell point downward to the ground, his hand half-severed at the wrist by a dexterous twirl of the stranger's sword. It was the last place the man could have expected a blow, but the stranger had discovered that a portion of the hand-guard of his sword had been broken off and he was quick to take advantage of the exposed wrist.

The renegade sprang backward, a look of baffled rage upon his face and a curse upon his lips. The savages saw that he was defeated, and, true to their treacherous natures, they uttered a frightful war-whoop and charged upon the victorious stranger.

But this was no more than Old Sol and Dismal had expected of them, even had the renegade been the victor, and they were prompt to act. The next instant the rattling bark of their revolvers and the shouts of the bordermen were mingled with the savage yells in one horrible tumult of battle.

In the very midst of the fray flashed the deadly sword of the mysterious stranger. Captain Rivers, with sword also, had entered the fray and rained terrible blows upon the savages. The negro, Congo, proved himself the bravest of the brave, but he soon fell with a cloven skull at the side of his master. Tamarac Tom, with clubbed rifle, laid about him with giant blows, mowing a swath through the ranks of the foe, while Old Polar and Dismal, skilled veterans of many a hand-to-hand contest, dodged the blows aimed at their heads, and at the same time made every shot from their revolvers count. The red-skins fought alone with tomahawks, and as

they rushed in a body upon the whites, those behind fought at some disadvantage.

With the whites there was more in keeping out of the reach of the tomahawks, and at the same time striking deadly blows, than in the way the blows were dealt. The long arm and sweeping gun-barrel of Tom Pope enabled him to keep the foe beyond reach of him, and while his weapon was not so deadly it was most effective in sweeping down and confusing the foe, his friends doing the deadly work.

The conflict had been raging but a few brief seconds, and was fierce as the deadly animosity of mortal foes could make it, when, suddenly, there occurred a terrific explosion or report within the limits of the battle-ground. It was almost instantly followed by a second, and the very concussion seemed to cause the savages to reel backward, and with a cry of dismay turn and flee, leaving the whites the victors and their dead and wounded upon the bloody field.

It was a most surprising turn of affairs, for at the moment the red-skins were holding their ground with a hopeful stubbornness, when those crashing explosions seemed to fill them with sudden fear. And great was the amazement of the whites, on looking around for the source of those friendly explosions, to see Imp, the Elf of the Woods, standing near with a great double-barreled shot-gun in his hands—the muzzle still smoking—his eyes big as moons and his little form all a-quiver with excitement and curiosity.

"Boy! did you do that?" exclaimed Tamarac Tom.

"Yes, massa, me and Old Belcher," replied the lad.

"Bravo! bravo!" yelled Polar Sol; "you are a glorious little rascal, Imp! But, I say, stranger"—turning to the mysterious swordsman—"you did some o' the nicest, grandest work since the days o' Bunker Hill. By the sword o' Gideon! you are an artist with the sword! Shake, stranger!"

"I thank you, sir, for the compliment, but I am afraid our victory has been dearly bought, after all," said the stranger, in a calm, serious tone, as he glanced around him over the scene of battle at the prostrate forms.

"By Heavens! Captain Rivers and Congo are down, and Dismal's hurt!" cried Sol, glancing around him.

In the wild excitement of the moment the fall of Rivers had not been observed before. He was lying prone upon his face. Not far from him lay the lifeless form of Congo, while at another place Old Dismal was just staggering to his feet, his face covered with blood. Tamarac Tom had received some slight wounds, but Polar Sol and the stranger had escaped without a scratch.

Polar hurried to the side of Captain Rivers and turned him on his back. He had a gaping wound on the head and another in the shoulder, from which the crimson tide of life was fast ebbing away.

The stranger hastened to Sol's assistance. They discovered that the captain was not dead, and immediately proceeded to stanch the wounds, the stranger displaying a skill that convinced Sol at once he possessed some knowledge of surgery.

The Imp, standing near, was ordered by the stranger to run and bring some water. The boy scampered away, and in about ten minutes returned with the water in a wooden bucket.

"Boy," exclaimed Old Sol, "whar did you git that vessel?"

"At my cabin," answered the stranger for him.

"Ah! then you live near here, and that black kid are your folk?"

"Yes, sir," answered the man, as he proceeded to wash and dress the captain's wounded head.

Meanwhile Tamarac Tom had started off into the woods in search of his sweetheart, June. Imp saw him, and, divining his purpose, ran after him, and when he came up with him, inquired:

"Massa Tom, be you gwine to look for de young missus?"

"Yes, Imp; do you know where she is?"

"Yes, Massa Tom, I runned away wid her," replied the boy, with a grin, "when de fight war 'bout to begin. I slipped up to de skeert young missus and tole her if she foller me I'd take her whar she be safe, and I jist flutter her off to Massa Omar's cabin on Refuge Islan', and when I went for de bucket to bring de water in I tole her 'bout de awful big fight; an' she ax 'bout you, and I tole her, and she gruppured her hands and rolled her eyes up, and said somefin' to he'self, and then she laughed and cried—oh, she jus' scotched."

"Imp, you're a little hero!" declared Tom.

with a smile of joy; "you're worth your weight in gold."

"Golly, Mar's Tom, you's chock full ob tickle-words, ar'n't you? But now I'se gwine to git Ole Belcher and git 'im home."

"Who's Belcher, Imp?" asked Tom.

"Why, Belcher am dat ole twir-bar'led shot-gun. Lor' 'mighty! massa Tom, if I didn't jis' feed he plom full ob powder and bullets, and when I teched 'im off he ram back 'g'inst me wusser'n my billy-goat, Nick. I mos' awful 'feard I not git back 'fore de fight was over."

"You got there in time to do heroic work, Imp. You and Belcher put the Ingins to rout and ended the fight. But let us return to our friends; they may need our help."

Side by side the giant and pigmy returned to the scene of the battle. They found Captain Rivers had recovered consciousness, but was very weak from loss of blood and was suffering much.

In the mean time, the strange swordsman had informed Polar Sol and his friends that his name was Omar, and that he had once been a practicing physician and surgeon, and that, if Captain Rivers was removed to his cabin he would do all in his power to save his life. He informed them that his cabin was on an island in the Lake-of-Isles not far distant. He told the hunters that they would all be welcome under his roof as long as they wished to remain, and as Old Dismal had received wounds that needed some attention they concluded to accept his invitation, and at once prepared to go home with him.

A litter of poles and a blanket was constructed and the wounded captain placed thereon, carried down to the lake and laid in the canoe in which the kind-hearted and brave Dr. Omar had come ashore. Then Omar and Polar entered the craft and, seating themselves, the former took up the paddle and pushed off into the lake. They crossed a narrow expanse of water and entered a dark tunnel-like passage between two wooded islands. They were just emerging from this into the light of more open water when Old Polar was suddenly startled by sight of something swimming in their wake with the rapidity of a beaver. It was about twenty paces away. Involuntarily Sol's hand dropped to his belt. The movement brought a smile to Dr. Omar's face.

"It's the boy, Imp," he explained.

"Sword o' Gideon! what for a critter is he?" exclaimed the hunter.

"Certainly one of the most remarkable beings I ever saw. He is but fifteen years of age, and yet by his wonderful feats of daring and adventure, he has been named by some one, the Elf of the Woods."

Lying upon his back in the water the boy swam alongside the boat, then rising upon his feet he stood erect, his body to the waist exposed, and kept pace with the boat by "treading" water!

This he kept up for a rod or two when, all of a sudden, he dropped downward into the water out of sight. Old Sol, highly amused at his antics, watched for him to rise to the surface where he had disappeared. Several moments passed, and as he did not come up, the hunter was growing uneasy when his ears were suddenly greeted by a "youk, youk, youk"—a "croupy" bark he had heard the night before—on his left, and looking around he saw, about four rods away, a number of waves circling out from a dark object which proved to be the head of Imp.

"Wal, I'll be sacrificed!" exclaimed Polar, "that black critter must be part fish."

"If you'd see him climb a tree," said Omar, "you would think he was part monkey, though he is without doubt a most marvelous swimmer. He can remain under water a longer time than it would take to drown a hooked-fish. He is as active as a squirrel, cunning as a fox, and fears nothing by day nor the gloomiest night. He can climb a hundred feet into a tree and rob a swarm of bees of their honey with impunity. He keeps my table supplied with the choicest of wild honey. Squirrel-nests have been robbed of their young by him. The nests of crows, hawks and eagles for five miles around have yielded tribute to that boy's reckless daring. One day he came in with a bear's cub under each arm, almost frightening Old Hulda, his mother, out of her senses. He almost worries the life out of the kind, indulgent old woman. I, too, he is worth a dozen ordinary men to me in my secluded life. He alone can supply my table with fish, fowl and flesh. He is a good rifle-shot, and as skillful at hunting as he is skillful in swimming and climbing, and more cunning and fertile in ex-

pedients in trapping game than any trapper I ever heard of.

While thus conversing the boat had passed by three or four little islands and, finally, came in sight of the one on which Omar's cabin stood. In size it was five or six acres in area, almost round and rising gradually from the surrounding waters to the center. It was devoid of timber except on the elevated center where there was perhaps an acre of tall, magnificent pines. In the center of this little grove stood Dr. Omar's cabin, a wide, low building of logs.

"You've a fine location there, doctor," Polar Sol remarked; "how long have you been there?"

"Not long," replied Omar, "though long enough to give the lake the name of being the abode of the Evil Spirit. This comes, however, I think, of Imp's performances 'round and about the lake, and his black face which to the red-skin, seems suggestive of evil."

"But why a man like you, doctor, would want to live here out of the world and the society in which I know you war born and bred, is what stumps me," declared Old Sol.

"I like solitude, Polar," replied Omar, in an evasive manner.

At this juncture the boat touched the island, and landing the old hunter and recluse lifted the wounded man from the boat and bore him tenderly up the grassy slope to the cabin.

At the door they were met by a fat negress of fifty—the mother of Imp—and the fugitive maiden, June.

The wounded captain was placed upon a bed in the doctor's private bed-chamber, his clothing removed, and his wounds again more carefully dressed, and in a short time he was resting as easy and comfortable as it was possible for human skill and kindness to make him under the circumstances.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PICTURE ON THE WALL.

WHILE the doctor was engaged in dressing Rivers's wounds, Polar Sol held a conversation with Old Hulda, the negress, and the fair June. In the mean time, Imp came in and insisted on the hunter going out and seeing his pet bears, and to please him the borderman went out and looked at the half-grown cubs that were inclosed in a log pen. But what pleased Sol's fancy most was a pair of great Siberian bloodhounds chained in their kennel back of the house.

When the hunter returned to the cabin the doctor had finished his work for the time and invited Sol to step into his "arsenal" and inspect his weapons of defense. He then led the way into a small room in one corner of the cabin where no less than a dozen different kinds of fire-arms stood leaning against the wall. There was a Spencer carbine, a Henry rifle, a Springfield rifle, and others of various make and efficiency, including Imp's Old Belcher, which he had returned, and an old musket or two. There was also a pair of navy revolvers, with bullets, powder and caps in abundance. And last, but not least, in a box in the corner was a score of hand grenades.

"Doctor Omar," said Polar Sol, when he had looked at the weapons, "you've got the tools to fight with, but whar's your men to use 'em?"

"There are three combatants in my family," replied Omar, "myself, Imp and his father. Old Joe left a week ago for supplies, and I'm expecting him back 'most any day or hour. But still, I have no fears of the Indians—that is, I have not had, but there's no telling what to-day's troubles may bring."

"Yes, that reminds me I must return for Dismal and Tom Pope," said Sol, and he at once left the cabin, proceeded to the lake, and boarding the canoe returned to his waiting friends.

The body of the slain Congo was buried, the effects of Captain Rivers were placed in the boats, and the horses driven into the lake and forced to swim over to an island where there was little timber and plenty of pasture. Then the hunters started for the doctor's cabin, discussing the situation as they proceeded.

When they reached the island June was at the landing to greet her boy lover, Tamarac Tom.

Rivers's effects were taken ashore, and then Sol and Dismal started to the cabin, leaving the lovers lingering behind.

"Say, Dismal," observed Sol, as they walked slowly up the hill, "what do you think now 'bout Ingins troubles?"

"I say the ball's opened in good shape," replied Dismal, "and that folks on this island'll not be safe long. But now, Polar, let me ax you what you think o' this man, Doctor Omar?"

"I think he's a gentleman with a big heart, and's an old master with the sword. But why

he's here in this lonely place I can't say. If I thought he war capable o' a wrong I'd say he war hidin' here from justice, as many a man has done. But he's no outlaw, and yet I'm satisfied that he's a man with a secret, and that secret may have all to do with his being here. In twenty years in the wilderness I've run across a dozen men that'd banished themselves to the wilds on account o' trouble o' some kind or other, if nothin' but dis'p'intment in love. But there is one thing certain, Diz, this man, Doctor Omar is, in my opinion, the very feller that clipped off Peter Zull's head last night, and yit I don't want to quiz him 'bout it. He's done, and still doin', us a good turn, and if he saves the captain's life we'll owe him a debt o' eternal gratitude, for I'll swar I never met a man that I think so much of as that man Rivers. And that reminds me that we've got to foller that raft. The poor captain'll never rest till he's in his grave, unless the secret o' that murderous craft is solved. The fact is, Dismal, I've a sneakin' curiosity myself to board that boat."

"Is 'pose so," replied Dismal, facetiously, "you know thar's a pretty woman aboard it. Oh! what a multitoodinous fool an ole fool is 'bout a handsome woman!"

Their arrival at the cabin put an end to their conversation.

Tamarac Tom and June still lingered by the water talking over the events of the day. Finally June asked:

"Tom, do you know what become of Carl Costello?"

"I do not, and yet I do know he did not risk his cowardly head in the fight," responded Tom, "though he encouraged the savages in their pursuit of us as they passed him where Imp had curled him up on the ground."

"Oh, what shall I do?" cried the maiden; "it will be almost sure death for me to return to the village—"

"But, my dear June," interrupted Tom, "you must not go back there while Costello liv's."

"But, Tom, you forget my mother is there, poor, dear soul!"

"No, June, I did not overlook that fact, nor your love and respect for your mother. Here you will be safe from Costello's power, and I will contrive some way to get word to your mother of your whereabouts, and perhaps induce her to come to you. I will lay your case before Dr. Omar and I feel sure he will advise you to remain. We hunters will protect you with our lives. Polar Sol informs me there is a colored woman at the cabin. If so, she will be some company for you. But, if after we hear from your mother, and it's her wish, and you feel it your duty to return to her, I will escort you there, or as near there as I dare go."

Between the propriety of her remaining in the cabin of a stranger, and the danger of going back to the Indian village, the maiden was undecided until they had returned to the cabin, and Tom had stated her case to Dr. Omar, who decided the matter for her by saying in fatherly kindness:

"You should accept Tom's advice and remain here where you are ten thousand times welcome, until word can be sent and received from your mother. Here your honor will be guarded as though you were my own daughter, and here, with these brave men, your life will be protected!"

"Amen!" shouted Old Polar, "that's what'll be did, doctor. I tell you thar's more nervine and solid comfort in fightin' for the life and honor o' a pretty gal than anything on earth even if she are some other feller's sweetheart. We—that's me and Dismal—have been thar before. With a good-lookin' woman in sight, I co believe in my soul, my solemn-faced chum can do more fancy fightin' than a hull fleet o' Trejans. We propose to linger 'round here till the captain's able to get out, and jist as much longer as we're needed."

After some further discussion of the situation Polar and Dismal arose and went out to lock over the island.

Dr. Omar remained in conversation with Tom Pope and June until he was suddenly startled by a cry of pain from the lips of Captain Rivers in the adjoining room.

An hour before, after dressing the young officer's wounds, the doctor had given him a powder to ease his pain, and under the influence of this he had fallen into a doze and the doctor had thus left him to speak with the other guests.

Hastening to his bedside when he heard his cry the doctor found Rivers lying upon his back his hand slightly elevated, staring wildly at the portrait of a fair and lovely young woman that hung on the wall of the room at the foot of the bed.

"What's wrong, captain?" the recluse asked. Raising his hand and pointing at the picture on the wall, the captain cried out:

"Where did you get that, doctor? *It is the picture of my young wife!*"

Dr. Omar started. A strange smile passed over his face, and in a low tone he replied:

"No, captain, you are mistaken; that is the portrait of my young wife!"

CHAPTER IX.

DR. OMAR'S STORY.

FOR a few moments Captain Rivers lay speechless gazing up into the face of his kind host, a startled, puzzled expression upon his bloodless face. Nor was the look of the recluse any less curious and startling. That each should claim the portrait as that of his wife seemed most singular and absurd to the other. Dr. Omar was the first to break the momentary silence that followed their strange declarations.

"Yes, captain," he continued; "that is the portrait of my wife. She has been dead these many long years. You must be excited, captain, and this you must avoid henceforth, if you would ever rise from that bed."

"Doctor Omar," said Rivers, "in my coat yonder, in an inner pocket, is a leathern card case. Will you please hand it to me?"

The doctor got him the case from which the captain took the photograph of the woman he had shown Old Polar, saying:

"Doctor, look at that and tell me if it is not the very counterpart of that portrait, even to the arrangement of the hair."

The doctor looked at the picture. An exclamation of surprise escaped his lips. His hand trembled slightly, and as he continued to look first at one picture and then the other, a strange expression seemed to light up his hitherto immobile face.

"Captain," he finally said, "the resemblance is strangely wonderful, but of course it can be nothing more than a coincidence, unless—but, captain, where is your wife?"

"I left her months ago in Ohio, though her home is in Kentucky," Rivers answered; "but I am not so sure she is there now."

"And why not?"

"You have heard my friends speak of a strange craft we saw—yes, encountered on the Red River yesterday."

"Yes, and late yesterday evening—after nightfall, in fact—I saw that craft," replied the doctor, seating himself by the bedside.

Captain Rivers then related the story of his marriage with Irene Hanlon, almost word for word as we have already heard it. He also told him of the murderous shots fired from the raft, and of seeing aboard the boat the woman he believed to be his wife.

After he had finished his story, Omar asked:

"Was her father opposed to your marriage?"

"Yes; else we would never have resorted to a secret marriage, the prudence of which you and many others may question. And if that woman aboard the raft is my wife, our marriage may have something to do with her presence here almost out of the world."

"Are you sure, captain, that she is the daughter—I mean the flesh and blood of the man who claims her as his own child?"

"I know nothing to the contrary."

"What is her age?"

"About twenty years."

The doctor glanced at the picture on the wall, and for several moments seemed engaged in mental reflection. Finally he turned to Rivers and continued:

"Captain, did it ever occur to you that she might not be Hanlon's child?"

"It has often occurred to me as absolutely phenomenal that a father who, like Morgan Hanlon, was so uncultured and destitute of moral attributes, could be the father of a child so pure in heart, and possessed of the most delicate instincts and impulses of high-born womanhood. But why, doctor, do you ask this question?"

"Because, Rivers, if she is not Hanlon's own child she is—she *must be my daughter*—the child of that woman!" he declared, pointing to the portrait.

The captain was somewhat surprised at his friend's words, and yet they but confirmed the previously formed conclusion that the recluse was a man with a secret sorrow.

After a few moments of silence the doctor continued:

"Captain, ever since I first met you, there has seemed to be an affinity existing between us, and this feeling grows stronger the more I know of you and your life. I am a fatalist, and be-

lieve in foreordination, and as there may be more in my feelings toward you than you may think, I'm going to take you into my confidence and give you a bit of my history so that, whatever may be the outcome of matters, you will be prepared for the developments.

"In the first place, my name is *not* Omar, but it will do for the present. I am a man fifty years of age. Twenty-two years ago I lived with my young wife at New Orleans. I was, despite my years, a surgeon of reputation. Through the influence of a friend—a Spanish gentleman of high standing, I was induced, I am sorry to say, to accept the position of assistant-surgeon in the Royal Hospital on the island of Cuba. I did not know at the time that a young Spanish surgeon was displaced to make room for me, but I learned it to my sorrow shortly after I had removed to the island. I had been there less than six months when my friend died, and then the displaced surgeon, named Dorantes, a hot-headed and vindictive man by nature, determined to accomplish my ruin and thereby gratify his revenge on me for supplanting him in the hospital. The charge was finally made against me that I was a secret agent of a band of American filibusters who were in league with an organization of Cuban revolutionists. The charge was brought directly by Dorantes, himself, and supported by the testimony of no less than five coached witnesses procured from among the Spanish thieves and thugs that infested the dives of New Orleans. And right here let me say that one of them villainously paid the penalty of his bearing false witness against me, with his life last night. I refer to Juan Alvar, the peddler, that was in your tent."

"Ah! we mistrusted that you were his head-man," said Captain Rivers, "when we first met you to-day."

"Pending my trial," the recluse went on, "my young wife died, leaving a little girl-baby less than a year old. The death of my wife was caused directly from trouble over my arrest, and her death, at that time, was the hardest blow of all. My baby—my little Inez—I sent to my mother, living in New Orleans."

"But to make a long story short, I was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to be shot. I applied for a rehearing, and pending this I managed to escape prison through secret influences I promised never to reveal. But I escaped, and in disguise got away from the island in a smuggler, and made my way to Australia, fearing to return to America lest I be extradited. I had been hiding in Australia six years, when, one day, I chanced to meet one of the very friends who had aided my escape, and informed me that the conspiracy against me had been confessed by one of Dorantes's hired witnesses on his death-bed, or rather on the scaffold for another crime, and that I had been exonerated and recalled from exile, while a large reward was offered for Dorantes who, himself, had now become the hunted fugitive."

"Well, I at once returned to America with the wealth I had accumulated in Australia, expecting to settle down with my mother and baby, and thereafter keep away from Spaniards and Spanish hospitals. But judge of my surprise on reaching my mother's home to find my baby was not there, nor had she been for four years. It seems that shortly after my innocence had been established by the dying penitent, and, mark you, before my mother had learned of it, a man, a Spaniard, claiming to be my personal friend, and to know where I was in hiding, and even pretended to tell her—called at my mother's home and told her I had sent him for the child. Believing him, she gave the child up to him, and he went away telling her I would be heard from frequently. Within six weeks she learned of my exoneration from that very man that called for the child. He wrote her saying, that should I ever return home, to tell me that he had my child and had put it where I should never see it again, and hoped I would remember him always, and then went on about the sweetness of his revenge in a most brutal way—winding up by saying he was Dorantes."

"I at once employed skillful detectives and put them to work, but the trail was then four years old, and it looked like a very hopeless case. I went to work myself. I visited a thousand different places in the United States, Mexico and the provinces, where I thought the villain might be in hiding. I kept this up for years, without once getting a trace of him, and finally, I concluded that Dorantes must have gone to some foreign land, and I gave up in despair of ever finding him or my child."

"During my residence in Australia I had formed a great liking for the solitude of the

woods, for hunting, and when I settled down a few years ago I selected a romantic spot on a lake in the woods of Wisconsin, and there built a cabin, and there for some years I lived with my black servants, Old Joe, the husband of Hulda, and father of Imp. My cabin was always open to white man and red, and among those who stopped with me one evening was an old Red River hunter on his way to Northern Michigan. He was suffering some from the effects of a wound on his hand. I dressed it for him, and this led to his telling me of a white doctor or medicine-man, in Crow Wing's village on Moose Lake, in Northern Minnesota, that had first dressed his wounds. Instantly it struck me that that medicine-man might be Dorantes, but I asked no questions, and the next day I was off on a journey to Crow Wing's village, which I reached in due time, in disguise, and there, sure enough, was my man, sailing under the name of Mokomah, the medicine-man. I gave him no chance to recognize me, and got out of the camp as soon as possible. I remained in the woods, ostensibly as a hunter, for three weeks. The Indians were quite friendly, and in that time I could have slain Dorantes, had I wished. But I was afraid that his death might forever debar me from finding my child. At first I thought she might be with him in the Indian village, but she was not. I stayed around there long enough to make certain of this."

"Disappointed, but not disheartened, I returned to my cabin, and sought the assistance of a noted old border detective named Jack Drew, whom I had once met at Denver, and put him after Mokomah, in hopes he might be able to track him to where my child was."

"To be near the seat of operations I moved over to this lake, and with the help of Old Joe and those that helped to bring me over, I erected this cabin, and here I have been now but a few months. Meantime I have kept myself in the background, Jack Drew, Old Joe, and Imp doing whatever is necessary beyond the immediate vicinity of the lake, though I sometimes venture out, as I did yesterday evening and last night. I have endeavored to keep on good terms with the red-skins, but presume this morning's conflict with them will endanger my situation. But I have nothing to regret. I could not resist the temptation to fight that big renegade, knowing my skill as a swordsman."

"One of the first things Jack Drew learned was that Mokomah was not fixed in his place of business—that is, he was in the habit of going away from the village and sometimes remaining away a month or two at a time. About four weeks ago he went off on one of those trips somewhere, and Jack Drew is after him. What the result will be I cannot tell, but may it not be possible that his return may have something to do with the presence of that woman on the raft? One thing I feel certain of, and that is that Peter Zull, as he called himself, belonged to that raft and was traveling ashore as an advance scout, carrying a peddler's pack as a blind, and communicating with the raft by secret means. And since he was Dorantes's tool on the Island of Cuba, he is doubtless the same here, and if so, then Dorantes must have been aboard that raft. Should my friend, Jack Drew, put in an appearance soon I would almost feel certain of being right. But, captain, I must not tax your patience. I forget the duty of a physician to his patient, and as I see you have some pain I will give you another powder."

Tom Pope coming in to see the captain relieved the doctor in his attendance at the bedside, and he—the doctor—walked out to consult with Polar Sol and Dismal. He found them a little way from the cabin seated upon the grassy slope talking, and as he approached them Sol asked:

"Doctor, how soon do you think Cap Rivers 'll be likely to get around?"

"Well, the captain is a young, healthy man and if nothing happens to prevent, he may be able to leave his bed in two weeks, and the island in perhaps a month or six weeks."

"Sword o' Gideon! are it possible the soldier's chopped up that bad? But then, it makes no difference; we'll stay by him till the lake goes dry or the island sinks, even tho' the savages come like the locusts o' Egypt. Our affairs at home 'll keep if we never git back, and while we're waitin' for the captain to git around we'll look 'bout that raft—foller it into the provinces but what we'll know all 'bout it and its crew. But, we'll have to keep a clus watch on the red-skins for awhile. They'll be apt to try to avenge the death o' their friends, and when they do they'll come like hornets and every man 'll be needed right here. But, doctor, you've a pair o' hounds up thar that looks as though they

could do some pow'rful nasty work 'round a red-skin's jugular."

"Yes, but I hope I may never have occasion to turn them loose," replied the doctor.

"Ho, Mar's Omar?" suddenly called Imp from the cabin, "mommy says dat dinner am ready."

"Come, friends," said Omar turning toward the cabin; "I know you are hungry, for it is now past noon, and your strength has been heavily taxed since breakfast."

Returning to the cabin, they were all at once seated at the doctor's table, upon which Old Hulda had spread a sumptuous and inviting meal.

CHAPTER X.

THE RAFT AT ANCHOR—IMP AND THE SAVAGE.

As the day wore away and night approached, the islanders became quite uneasy through fear of a night attack by the Indians, for several of the dusky fellows had been seen near the close of day flitting like shadows among the islands. But as soon as it was dusk, Polar Sol and Tamarac Tom, who had made friends with the two bloodhounds, each took one of the dogs and patrolled the island until midnight, when they were relieved by Doctor Omar and Imp, who kept watch until morning. Old Dismal, who was suffering somewhat from the effects of his wounds received in battle, remaining at the cabin with Captain Rivers and the women.

Although the suspense of that night was great, not a thing was seen or even heard of an enemy. But this immunity from danger did not relieve the little band of islanders of their fears, nor cause them to relax their vigilance for a moment.

With the dawn of the new day, however, the anxiety of Captain Rivers and Doctor Omar about the mystery of the raft became so great, that Polar Sol concluded he would go at once and try and investigate the matter. But Doctor Omar would not hear of his going alone, and as daylight revealed the surroundings of the island clear of enemies, he concluded to accompany him; and so immediately after breakfast the two men embarked in a canoe, crossed the lake to a point nearest the river, and landing and concealing their canoe, struck out down the river.

They moved along rapidly yet cautiously. They hoped to overtake the raft before it had passed opposite the Indian village, which was about ten miles down the river. But in this they were disappointed; however, they passed on unobserved more than five miles beyond the village, and still the raft was not overhauled. Finally, they came to the conclusion that the boat could not have drifted so far in so short a time, and that it had dropped aside into some cove or bayou. Acting upon this belief they turned about and began retracing their steps up the river and finding a canoe, about a mile beyond the Indian village on the river, they boarded it and crossed the stream so as to be able to explore the lakes and bayous on that side having connection with the river.

Moose Lake, connected with the Red River by a marsh or lagoon fully a mile long, was the first sheet of water to claim their inspection and, to their joy, discovered the object of their search, the mysterious boat, anchored out in the very center of the lake nearly a mile from shore, the craft having made its way there through the open waters of the lagoon.

The two men had a fair view of the craft and the Indian village stretching along the whole lake front on the opposite side. The raft stood so that the swivel-gun on board pointed south which was evidence of expected danger from that quarter.

Persons could be seen on deck walking to and fro, but all were men.

Seating themselves on the bank where they could not be seen from the boat, the two men ate a lunch, meanwhile keeping a sharp watch on the boat, and discussing the character of the craft and its crew. Both were of the opinion that it had reached its destination, and also that there was something not only mysterious, but of a criminal nature about it and its occupants.

While they were watching it they saw a boat put out from the northern shore, at a point where a large party of Indians were congregated, and head for the raft. It contained two occupants, but whether Indians or white men the watchers could not tell, but it satisfied them that a friendly communication had already been established between the raft and the village.

Having learned all that it seemed possible for

them to in relation to the mysterious boat, the two men started on their return to the Lake-of-Isles, determined, however, to visit Moose Lake again as soon as possible and continue their investigation of the armed craft.

The sun was still two hours high when they entered their own canoe on the dark, silent waters of the Lake-of-Isles. Dr. Omar used the paddle while Polar Sol sat in the stern of the boat his eyes and ears upon the alert. They were nearing the resident island when the old hunter suddenly discovered something swimming across a narrow passage between two islands which lay a few rods before them, but, owing to the shadows he could not make out what it was. Calling the recluse's attention to his discovery he suggested they land upon the nearest island and watch the surrounding islands a few minutes in the hope of making some discoveries.

In this the doctor readily concurred and in a short time they had effected a landing on a densely wooded islet, one of a group of a dozen, where the waters between them were narrow and shaded—offering excellent advantages to a lurking foe.

Crossing to the opposite side of the island upon which they had landed—keeping under cover of the bushes—the two men carefully searched the waters and islands before them, and they had no sooner done so than they discovered a lithe figure glide from the bushes on an island on the left, and about four rods away, slip nimbly down the bank into the water to his knees and there pause and gaze around him.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the doctor with a smile, "it's Imp, the Elf. The little rascal is out on one of his rampages. That's what you saw swimming, Polar. If there's an Indian among these islands that boy'll know—but now what is he up to?"

The lad, still standing to his knees in the water, had assumed a crouching attitude and then, all of a sudden, he made a grab at something in the water—something which he grasped and held above his head—a long, slender object that writhed and squirmed in his hand and which the two watchers readily saw was a large water-snake.

Amused as well as disgusted with the boy's antics, Omar and Sol kept perfectly still and watched him. Presently they saw him start across the narrow channel of water toward the island nearest the one he had just left and perhaps two rods away. He held on to his wriggling snake, holding the reptile by the neck; and as he advanced the water grew deeper until it took him to the chin, when it seemed to suddenly grow shallower; but the fact was it had become too deep for wading and the boy had begun "treading," a feat he performed so marvelously that Polar Sol could not help expressing, in a quiet tone, his amazement and surprise.

In this way the black lad crossed the channel, but instead of landing on the island, passed out of sight around the south end. The watchers were on the eve of returning to their canoe when they were startled by the sight of an Indian warrior coming from under cover of the very islet that Imp had just left, step on the bank, peer around him, then slip down into the water and begin crossing the channel, to all appearance following in the very footsteps of the boy.

"The red devil," whispered Old Sol, "he's follerin' the boy, I reckon, to git his woolly skulp! Shall I put a chunk o' lead through his tufted head, doctor?"

"Wait a moment," replied Omar; "he expects to wade that water thinking, perhaps, Imp did. I've no other idea than that the water is ten or fifteen feet deep there in the middle of that channel. If so, the Indian will get woefully fooled."

Cautiously the red-skin waded into the water. At every step it grew deeper, and, at length he found himself in to his neck. Stopping he looked around him like one in a puzzling predicament—unable to understand how it was that the boy could wade where he could not. He seemed in doubt as to whether to turn back or go on; and while thus tarrying, Omar and Sol saw a round, black object pop up out of the water a few feet behind the savage, and they at once recognized it as the head of the irrepressible Imp who had his snake still in hand!

The Indian hearing the commotion in the water, quickly turned his head and glanced back over his shoulder. As he did so, Imp gave voice to his favorite croupy "youk," swung his snake around his head a time or two and then dealt the savage a resounding smack in the face with it, causing the startled red-man to cry out with pain, stagger back and for a moment disappear under the waves!

CHAPTER XI.

AN EXCITING AND AMUSING CONFLICT.

POLAR SOL could scarcely restrain an outburst of laughter as the savage staggered and disappeared beneath the water under the blow Imp had dealt him with the writhing serpent.

The savage, however, soon appeared on the surface again, and with a half-strangled yell lunged at the boy like a demon. But, the little sprite was on his guard, and, as it seemed, in his favorite element—the water—and as he leaped back and to one side, he dealt the red-skin a second blow with the snake squarely across the eyes that caused the warrior to howl with pain and for a moment to stagger in blindness. Imp immediately followed up with other further blows of his serpent-whip until the savage was compelled to retreat and, taking to deep water, attempted to escape to the opposite island by swimming.

But, good a swimmer as he was, Imp was better, and before he was within ten feet of the island the boy was between him and the shore, ready to renew the attack. Stung to fury, the red-skin determined to destroy the little torment, and charged upon him. Imp gave him one blow, but before he could repeat it the savage was close upon him, and he had to retreat, taking to deep water.

Thinking, perhaps, that the boy had been vanquished, the red-skin swam in pursuit of him; but never was an Indian more mistaken than he. No sooner was he in deep water than Imp turned on him with his repulsive whip and dealt him one blow after another in the face and over the head until the fellow was forced to dive under the water to escape. But he had no sooner appeared in sight again than the boy's whip began to fall upon him. Turn which way he might, the lad was soon in front of him; and seeing there was no more hope of catching him in the water than a fish, he made another attempt to escape.

It was no doubt fearfully humiliating to the savage to have to flee before such an insignificant foe as the pigmy black, but he seemed to know the boy's advantage lay in the element they were in, and that once ashore he would soon crush the little foe. But Imp was equally as wise as his adversary, and realized, too, wherein his advantage lay, and exerted every effort to hold it by heading the Indian away from the shore.

"I'll sw'ar, doctor," Polar Sol declared, as the contest continued between the red-skin and black, "that's the most multitudinous Roman holiday I ever witnessed, and if I don't git to laff soon—out-loud roar and howl—I'll explode. I tell you that boy is possessed o' a mischievous devil! Think o' a great, savage warrior being whipped to death with a snake in the hand o' a black brat o' a nigger boy!"

After repeated efforts to reach the islands near him, the Indian finally struck out into more open water, and made for the very island the two hidden spectators were on. But Imp, divining his intention, speedily swam around him and cut him off, giving him a blow with his dismal whip, which by this time had the life lashed and choked out of it, and in fact, a few inches of the tail "flayed" off, so that a blow from it was almost as damaging as that of a club.

Beaten off from the third island, the Indian struck out for more open water, swimming quite rapidly; but this movement proved fatal to him, for he was no sooner away from the immediate vicinity of an island than he was brought to bay like a stag by the whip of Imp, who, like a hound, swam round and round him, belaboring him all the while. This he kept up until, with sheer exhaustion, the savage was overcome and sunk beneath the waves, rose and sunk, rose again, and went down in death!

For a moment after he had disappeared for the last time, Imp stood in the water watching the rising bubbles, a grim look of satisfaction on his black face; and while thus engaged, Dr. Omar, in fun, fired a shot from his revolver, the bullet striking the water near the boy. But scarcely had the ball "zipped" on the water before Imp's head went down, his heels flashed in the air, and down went the boy under the water like a muskrat; nor did the two men see him again until, half an hour later, they landed on Refuge Island, where Imp, the Elf of the Woods, was the first to greet them.

They said nothing at the time of what they had witnessed; but some time after their return they heard the lad narrate, in a spirit of pride, his adventure with the red-skin in the lake; nor did he exaggerate in any particular. But his mother, who always had an idea that her hope-

ful was not a truthful boy, exclaimed, after he had concluded his story:

"Fo' God, chile, you'll choke to death some ob dese days tellin' yo' big w'oppers 'bout what you does in de woods and de water! Go 'long wid you, for you do no sich t'ing, an' if yo' don't quit yo' lyin' I'll break yo' head!"

"Hulda," spoke up Dr. Omar, "your son is telling you the truth, for Sol and I witnessed his adventure."

"Yes, a meetin'-house truth, Mrs. Hulda," affirmed Polar. "That kid o' yourn are a royal little buccaneer, and you'd ought to be proud o' him as a hen with one chick."

Old Hulda cast a smiling glance at her offspring, as she listened to these words of praise; but as soon as Polar Sol had finished speaking, Imp inquired:

"Who shoot dat bullet at me? You do dat, Mars' Omar?"

The two men indulged in a hearty laugh at the boy's expense, and then admitted the fact.

Dr. Omar found Captain Rivers resting quietly, although the news from the flat-boat or raft was quite disappointing to him. But Old Sol assured the sick man that no time nor pains would be spared to solve the mystery surrounding the craft, and now that it had stopped quite near, evidently at its journey's end, there would be little difficulty in keeping watch upon it.

During the evening of that day Old Joe, the husband of Hulda and father of Imp, returned from the trading-post with a supply of flour and groceries. He was accompanied by two young men named Ed Morton and Dick Herbert, who belonged at a settlement far up the river. They had heard of a prospective Indian war, and, like many a young man who knows but little of the dangers and hardships incident to Indian warfare, became anxious to distinguish themselves as Indian-fighters, and set out for the scene of action. Falling in with Old Joe, they had accompanied him to the Lake-of-Isles, where they were welcomed by Dr. Omar, and promised by Old Sol a chance to have their wishes of fighting red-skins gratified at no distant day if they would remain at the island.

Being well-armed and equipped, their addition to the defensive force of the island was very fortunate at the time, swelling the numbers of the defenders, including Imp, to eight persons, to say nothing of the two ferocious hounds.

To accommodate all with quarters, the shelter tent of Captain Rivers was pitched just alongside the cabin to which the young settlers were assigned, along with Polar Sol and Tamarac Tom.

That night passed away quietly, notwithstanding the guards discovered a number of Indians lurking about on the adjacent islands. But it was found next morning that Captain Rivers's horses had all disappeared from the island where they had been left, and an investigation showed that the Indians had taken them.

Dr. Omar and Polar Sol, during breakfast, discussed the propriety of fortifying their position against an attack. The old borderman urged it be done without delay, and when he had submitted his plans for making the defense the doctor readily acquiesced, and the work was begun at once.

There being two axes on the island, men were set to work felling the trees that stood on the knoll furthest from the cabin. These were cut into lengths of twelve feet each, and split and then set upon end in a ditch two feet deep close together, and then securely planted. They had timber enough to erect a stockade at the rear and south side of the cabin. The other two sides were to be protected by an *abattis* made of the larger boughs and limbs of the trees. These boughs were laid closely together and securely fastened, the ends pointing outward, all being sharpened. No less than three lines were thus constructed, the inner one coming flush with the lines of stockade. The entrance to the cabin was through the *abattis* though opening at different places in the different lines.

It required three days' labor for all hands to complete the work, but when it was done Polar Sol deemed it almost impregnable by a foe having to face besides a deadly fire from within. The only way the cabin could be reached through the *abattis* would be by chopping away the obstructions, and this could hardly be accomplished by a red-skin under fire, even with the cover of darkness around him.

After their defense had been completed Polar Sol and Tamarac Tom made a visit to Moose Lake to see about the shape affairs had assumed there. But they found no change even in the position of the raft so far as they could see. On their return home they fell in with a party of red-skins and it was only by some

lively running and fighting that they escaped back to Refuge Island.

This made them more cautious, and the presence of foes on and around the lake convinced the hunters that the next conflict would be on Refuge Island itself, and so every thing was made ready for the anticipated attack. Not a man was permitted to leave the island unless he went as a scout. But two days passed by and then it was discovered that the enemy had all withdrawn from about the lake. This, however, did not relieve the bordermen of their fears. In fact, it increased them, for they knew it was but a ruse of the red-skins to throw them off their guard; and so their vigilance was redoubled, and one morning, about an hour before day, the islanders were startled by the excited barking of one of the hounds and the crack of a rifle mingled with a savage death-wail.

Two minutes later the guards came hurrying within the defense—Polar Sol with the information that no less than fifteen or twenty canoes filled with savages had touched on the northern side of the lake. He had fired upon them and run, the report of his gun calling in the other patrols.

The entrance through the *abattis* was speedily closed, and then as the little band of defenders stood around him ready for the conflict, Old Polar said:

"Boys, the tug o' war is comin', and we must all remember that defeat means death! If we lick thunder out o' the red-skins they'll not trouble here again. There are many more o' them than o' us, and they've taken advantage o' this dark hour to attack us, but let us make it a Belshazzar's feast for them, and—"

His voice was here drowned by a fiendish yell that seemed to come from the throats of a thousand demons, but it was immediately answered by a yell of defiance from the throats of the little band of islanders.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BATTLE.

THE Indians had chosen the darkest hour of the night for their attack upon the island. The moon had long since gone down, and in the darkness they had expected to overwhelm the whites by a bold dash upon the cabin. It is not to be supposed, however, that they were ignorant of the whites being partially fortified at least, for the two lines of stockade could be seen from the lake, but it soon became evident that they were not aware of the obstructions on the north and east sides, and hurled themselves against the sharpened boughs with a force that must have inflicted great injuries upon many of them.

The defenders, standing in the deep shadows of the few trees left standing nearest the cabin, could see the horde of screaming red-skins as they approached and reserved their fire until they struck the defense when they opened upon them with a withering volley from rifles, and shot-guns loaded with buckshot.

The yells, cries and groans that at once became mingled with their terrible war-cries told that dreadful execution had been done in their ranks.

Finding themselves checked by the *abattis* the red-skins, or those possessing firearms, fired a volley at the defenders, but their shots were all aimed high and passed over the heads of the whites, pelting the roof and gables of the house.

The attack had been made from two points, thus compelling the defenders to divide their forces. But the latter being certain of their position, and perfectly familiar with all its advantages, were enabled to work with precision, while the savages were compelled to act at random in the darkness.

Old Hulda and June, both of whom knew how to load fire-arms aided materially in the defense. In the "arsenal" where a tallow dip was burning they stood and, with nimble fingers, reloaded the guns and passed them out to the defenders.

Another great help to the men and terror to the foe, were the two Siberian bloodhounds. Whenever a savage succeeded in creeping through the first line of *abattis*, the hounds were sure to detect him and force him to retreat or speedily end his career.

So vigorous and determined were the red-skins in their assault, that a breach was soon effected in the outer line of defense, and a wild, triumphant yell announced the fact, drawing the whole force to that point; but when they found their way to victory again disputed by another line of obstructions, and exposed to a more certain and deadly fire from the foe, it seemed that a panic was about to ensue in the ranks; and then

it was that the voice of a white was heard rallying the red-skins and encouraging them to the onset. Nor were his words without effect, for the Indians answered him with a wild war-whoop and again renewed their struggle more fiercely than ever. But so far their more desperate efforts had been concentrated upon the defense rather than the defender. To get at the latter, the former must be removed, and this could only be effected under a deadly fire.

The shot-guns of the defenders proved the most effective weapons in the random firing, and the heavy piece that Imp had used so successfully on a previous occasion, thundered and roared like a field-piece.

The savages displayed unusual courage in facing the defenders' fire, and the result of this was to effect a breach in the second line of *abattis*, which result was again announced by a yell of triumph; but it had scarcely died upon the foremost ones' lips ere they encountered the third line of sharpened boughs. But now the critical period for the defenders had come. Should another breach in the defense be made, all would be lost. The red-skins now could begin to see that but a few paces separated them from the blazing muzzles of the defenders' guns, and worked with a will to carry the last barrier between them and victory.

Dr. Omar now bethought him of the few hand grenades in the "arsenal," and gave the word for Hulda to light the fuses and pass them out. This the brave old negress did, assisted by June, and soon the terrible missiles were bursting among the screaming foe. It seemed to be a new danger they could not understand, and it soon became evident to their leader that they could not endure it. They began to waver from their assault on the *abattis* and fly for safety. Again their leader endeavored to rally them, but the bursting shells and the withering volleys from the rifles of the defenders were now more potent in filling their hearts with terror than his words were with encouragement. Moreover, this white renegade's voice suddenly became hushed. Old Polar, having located him by the sound of his voice, sent a double-discharge of buckshot in that direction, and he was not heard of afterward: but whether he was killed or frightened into silence they did not know then. But true it is that, with the silencing of his voice, the siege was raised and the savages fled; but, before they did so, it seemed that every one hurled his tomahawk at the defenders, determined to inflict as much damage upon them as possible. Had they done this when they first made the breach in the second line, there is no telling what would have been the result, for no less than three of the defenders were stricken down, and others injured by that single shower of missiles. And had it not been for this, the victory of the besieged would have been bloodless.

Tamarac Tom, Old Joe, and Dick Herbert, had all been stricken down by flying tomahawks. Tamarac, however, soon recovered from his injuries, but Old Joe had been struck on the head, and a frightful wound inflicted, from which he did not recover consciousness for several hours, and even then his life was despaired of. But Dick Herbert was dead. He had fought with all the courage of a veteran, and died in his first battle.

The grief of Ed Morton over his young friend's death was most agonizing. With this, his first battle, were dispelled all his dreams of renown as an Indian-fighter.

As soon as the conflict had ended, Dr. Omar hastened to inform Captain Rivers of the result, and was startled to find the captain out of bed. In the excitement around him, the wounded soldier had forgotten his injuries and arose. But the doctor got him back to bed, expressing a hope, which was evidence of his fear, that nothing serious would come of his excitement and over-exertions.

After this the doctor was called to attend the wounded, and for awhile the cries of old Hulda and Imp, as they stood by the unconscious form of Old Joe, made the cabin a house of sadness and mourning.

Tamarac Tom suffered but little from the effects of his injuries. The gentle hand of June bathed his head and bandaged it, and there was a magnetism in her touch, and an inspiration in her tender, sympathetic voice, that seemed to dispel the pain from his head, and flood his brave young heart with infinite joy.

Never was the coming of day hailed with greater joy than by the defenders of Refuge Island that morning, although it revealed more fully the dreadful horrors of the conflict, for there were no less than a dozen dead savages lying within sight of the cabin door, while

around the cabin lay nearly two-score of tomahawks that had been hurled at the defenders.

The removal and burial of the dead savages was the first work of the day to be done, and while engaged in this, a young Indian wearing the insignia of a war-chief was found at the edge of the island most painfully, if not fatally, wounded. Instead of ending his misery, as the savage would have done had it been on the other hand, Polar Sol had him carried to the tent by the cabin, where Dr. Omar dressed his wounds, and June, who recognized him as a young war-chief named Malakah, carried him water and provisions. At first the chief was silent and sullen, but when he found that he had nothing to fear from the whites, he brightened up and became communicative. From him June learned that the attack upon the island had been planned and led by Carl Costello, who was determined upon taking the life of Big Pine and possessing himself of her—June.

But the most gratifying news to all was that the Cuban renegade had been killed in the battle, his body having been filled with bullets while trying to rally the fleeing warriors. The Indian talked freely with June, who spoke his language fluently. He told her there were nearly a hundred warriors engaged in the attack, and that nearly half of them had been killed and wounded. It was supposed, he said, that the whites had but a part of their defense completed, and that the Indians knew nothing of the *abattis* until their advance had been checked by it.

Along in the afternoon of that day Dick Herbert's body was laid to rest on the eastern slope of the island; then the breaches in the *abattis* were repaired, and everything put in order again for the continued defense of the place. It was impossible for them to remove the wounded, Rivers and Old Joe, and the women refused to go to a place of safety, preferring to remain there and share their friends' danger rather than be separated from them. And to add to the bitter disappointment and fears of all, Captain Rivers was taken with a raging fever, the result of his excitement and over-exertion during the battle; and in spite of Dr. Omar's skill, he continued to grow worse from day to day. His strength gradually wasted away, and at times he became delirious. The doctor did not leave his bedside for two weeks, except for a few minutes at a time. Nor did one of the hunters leave the island, except to reconnoiter the surrounding waters and woods.

The condition of the captain seemed to throw a shadow over the spirits of the islanders. The successful execution of their future plans seemed to hang upon the result of the soldier's sickness. And thus three weeks dragged along; but a feeble spark of life remained in the weak, emaciated body, and one evening Doctor Omar announced that the captain's sickness had reached that stage wherein he was enabled to determine, almost to a certainty, the critical hour in the life of the sick man. He said that by midnight there would come a change for better or worse—life or death, with the odds in favor of the latter, ten to one.

Those of our readers who have ever heard this announcement in the case of a prostrate friend or relative, can realize the agonizing suspense, the almost breathless waiting, the choking sighs, the weary watching of the hands of the clock as they await the hour that is to decide the fate of the sick one.

No one retired that night. The women, Polar Sol and Dismal remained in the cabin; also little Imp, who curled himself up on the floor and dozed. The others, who were not on guard, remained in the tent outside.

Doctor Omar stood constantly by the sick man watching every breath—every thread-like pulse-throb.

Those in the adjoining room talked in whispers and walked on tip-toe. There was no time-piece in the cabin, but the old hunters could almost tell the exact hours of night by the stars, and so, ever and anon, one or the other of them would steal softly from the room and scan the sky and the position of the blinking stars with weary eyes.

And thus the hours were slowly on. The deep hush in the cabin, broken only by the dreary chirruping of a cricket, or the ticking of a death-watch, was painfully significant of the presence of death.

A weary, painful look was upon the grizzled faces of Sol and Dismal, while Old Hulda and June trembled in agony of suspense. Ever and anon one of those in the tent would come to the door and look into the dimly-lighted room at the silent forms, then turn away without a word.

The faces of those within spoke plainer than words.

Still the hours wore wearily on. The waiting friends were eager for the midnight hour to come and relieve them of their suspense, and yet dreaded its coming through fear that the verdict would be death.

Finally, Dismal, returning from a look at the stars, said:

"The hour's up and past."

Old Sol shook his head gloomily.

Still they waited on.

Nearly another hour had passed when they heard a footstep in the sick chamber, and Dr. Omar came softly into the room. And then every heart ceased to beat—every head was inclined forward to catch the doctor's words.

"The captain's asleep, and there are still hopes. The change is for the better."

Old Hulda groaned aloud a "bress de Lor'," but without a word Polar Sol and Dismal arose and went out into the night.

Dismal looked up and around him and in a half-choked voice said:

"Polar, ole boy, the sky looks hazy—it's goin' to rain."

But the sky was never brighter. The old hunter saw it through the mist in his big, solemn eyes, and with a low, chuckling laugh, Polar Sol said:

"Sword o' Gideon! did you hear my heart drop with a 'chug' outen my throat whar it's been pumpin' away for six hours, Diz? Heavens! whar a tussel! I'd ruther fight forty battles 'n go through that siege ag'in. But, Dismal, old sinner that you are, the Lord seems to be on our side, after all."

CHAPTER XIII.

A BABY'S CRY.

THE night wore away and the morning dawned clear and bright, and when the captain awoke the hunters were permitted to see him and speak a few kind words of congratulations and encouragement. But the young officer was quite weak and far from being out of danger, although the doctor had no fears now of his recovery unless taken with a relapse.

The secret of that mysterious raft had been upon Rivers's mind during all his sickness. He talked of it when delirious, and it was almost the first thing he spoke of to Polar Sol that morning.

"We're goin', captain," the hunter assured him, "to renew our investigation o' that raft jist as soon as we can get away with safety; so rest quiet, be of good cheer, and all will come out right eend to."

That day preparations were made to start again to Moose Lake. The journey was to be made in a canoe under cover of the coming night. This time had been selected because of the difficulty in descending the river with a boat in open daylight, for a reconnoissance had revealed the presence of red-skins in the forest about the lake. It was necessary that they have a boat on Moose Lake in order to reach the raft in case such a thing might at all be deemed expedient. Moreover, their operations on the lake would have to be conducted under cover of darkness.

It was finally settled that Polar Sol, Old Dismal, and Tom Pope were to compose the expedition to Moose Lake. Dr. Omar suggested that Imp be added to the party on account of his superior skill as a swimmer, and the boy was eager to go. But Polar Sol objected, fearing that the boy's impulsiveness might get them into trouble when everything depended on extreme silence and caution.

About dark the three bordermen embarked from the island. They pushed across the lake to its outlet, down which they moved, and finally entered the Red River. It was quite dark when they entered this great watercourse and headed down-stream. The utmost silence was observed by the trio, and a close watch kept upon all sides; but despite their vigilance they were suddenly started by discovering a round black object alongside their boat and a familiar voice saying in a low tone:

"Youk! youk!"

It was Imp, the Elf of the Woods. He had followed them in spite of Sol's objections, and there was no other alternative now but to take him aboard and make the best of it. He admitted that he had slipped away from the island determined to prove to Polar Sol that, were he his enemy, he could approach unobserved and unheard, "widout 'pulsiveness," close enough to take his—the hunter's—life, without his knowing it.

In time the lagoon connecting Moose Lake with the river was reached, and the passage of

its dismal waters began, and by midnight they were adrift upon the bosom of Moose Lake. A light breeze was blowing from the south, but, despite this fact, a white, steamy fog lay upon the waters of the lake.

Off toward the north, apparently suspended in the air, they could see a dull light, which they were satisfied marked the location of the raft, and so they let their boat drift before the wind in that direction.

In the course of an hour they had gained a point within forty rods of the light, which was, beyond question, on the raft. But all of a sudden this light was seen to move. It seemed to be carried hurriedly to and fro on the boat, and the bordermen made up their minds that their approach had been discovered and preparations for their reception were being made.

Acting upon this belief, Old Polar used the paddle sufficient to counteract the force of the waves and prevent their drifting nearer the enemy, while they awaited results. They could hear nothing for the wind was in the wrong direction, and yet they knew by the moving light that something unusual was about to take place on board the craft. When satisfied that their presence was not the cause of the commotion, a consultation was held as to the best course to pursue. To attempt to approach the raft in the canoe was considered too dangerous, and the only way left was by some one swimming to or near the craft, and picking up such information as they could regarding the mysterious concern and its crew.

Imp insisted on his being the party to go. He seemed to have such a clear knowledge of what would be required of the one going, the dangers of the adventure, and such perfect confidence in his ability to stem the tide that, after some argument, the hunters gave way and consented for him to go.

In a twinkling the boy had divested himself of most of his clothing, and having received minute instructions as to his duty, he quietly dropped himself overboard and the next moment his lithe figure had floated away into the shadows.

"Wonderful little Imp!" exclaimed Old Dismal, "but now we must be keeful and hold this boat right here, or he'll not be able to find us."

"That's all very true, Dismal," replied Polar; "but don't it seem a leetle reedicalous for the Cold Wave o' the Nor'west, the majestic Big Pine, and the mighty Moslem, Old Dismal, havin' to set here like three *turkies* while that somber-skinned boy performs a deed, or undertakes it, at least, that—"

"Polar," interrupted Dismal softly, "if we war half-crocodi e like that boy we might cavort 'round in the sea like a dolphin."

"Ay," replied Tamarac Tom; "and he's as expert on the ground or in a tree-top as in the water. He's brave as he is artful, dar'n' as he is cunning—in short, he's a human phenomenon."

And thus in whispers the three conversed, but not for a moment did they take their eyes off the light on the raft. They could see it still moving about at intervals. At times it would disappear for a few seconds then reappear again in moving around in various courses. That it was a lantern, there was no doubt in the minds of the hunter.

Patiently the bordermen awaited the return of their little spy, for patience is one of the characteristics of the successful hunter and scout. An hour, perhaps, had passed when the light on the boat was observed to be moving about quite excitedly, and for the first time the bordermen heard the sounds of low, but excited voices in that direction.

"By the Sword o' Gideon!" exclaimed Polar, "the hornets are stirred up at last! I do wonder if Imp has been discovered?"

"If so," replied Tamarac Tom, "it'll be all night to him."

"S'pose we bear down on the pirate and see?" suggested Dismal.

"No, no!" quickly protested Sol; "if the boy should return here and find us gone, it might be a fatal thing for us all. But there's something wrong on that craft, sure as sin, and I've a notion to swim down that way and inquire into it."

"If we were only around on the opposite side o' the craft, we could hear somethin'; but o' course it won't do to leave here till Imp gits back."

For several minutes the three men remained quiet, listening. But they could hear nothing. The light, however, was still bobbing about on the boat.

"I'm afraid the boy's in trouble," said Tamarac Tom, "or at least has alarmed the crew of that concern."

"I'm not afraid Imp'll git caught," responded

Polar, "but I reckon if daylight should suddenly come, we'd be listed out o' this water by a shot from that—"

"Hark! listen!" suddenly commanded Dismal.

Silence ensued. The three hunters started. A strange sound fell upon their ears. It did not emanate far away. It resembled the sobbing, pitiful wail of a young infant!

CHAPTER XIV.

MOKOMAH'S WRATH.

We will drop for awhile the main thread of our story, and take the reader to the Indian village, that we have already seen from the distance, lying along the northern shore of Moose Lake. It is on the day preceding the night of events just narrated that we would enter the village.

It was a little past noon when quite a commotion was created among the dusky denizens by the arrival of a party of three horsemen from the north. They were all white men, and one of them rather striking in his general appearance. He was a tall, dark-skinned man of fifty years, with long, black hair, a heavy black mustache, a small black eye, which of itself was indicative of a cold, cruel heart. He was dressed in the gorgeous and fanciful costume of an Indian medicine-man, and when he and his suit entered the village the name of Mokomah and the "White Medicine" passed from lip to lip.

Everywhere the man's presence was hailed with joy by old and young, and by the time he had drawn rein in front of Crow Wing's lodge he was surrounded by the entire village of savage denizens, eager to do him honor.

As the man dismounted and gave his horse to an attendant, Crow Wing, the chief, came from his lodge and exclaimed:

"Welcome back, Mokomah, to the village of Crow Wing!"

"And glad is Mokomah to return to his red friends," replied the medicine-man; "I hope I find Crow Wing and his red children well."

"Crow Wing is well, but his heart is gloomy and sad," the chief responded, as he led the way into his lodge, followed by Mokomah.

"Why is Crow Wing's heart sad?" asked the medicine-man.

"Many of his warriors are dead, and many of them wounded. The pale-face hunters are no longer the friends of the Sioux."

"Then there has been fighting going on since I was away?"

"Crow Wing has not formally dug up the hatchet of war," the chief replied, "but many of his warriors have been slain by the pale-face hunters on the Lake-of-Isles. For many months Crow Wing's warriors had never gone about that lake, for it was said the Evil Spirit had taken up his abode there. But one moon ago the young pale-face hunter, Big Pine, slew four Sioux warriors. Moosehead, Mokomah's white friend, went forth with a band of warriors to take the Big Pine and punish him. They met him in the forest by the Lake-of-Isles with many friends. A hard battle ensued and many of the Sioux were slain and Moosehead's hand almost severed from the wrist."

"Is that possible?" exclaimed Mokomah; "but pardon me, Crow Wing; go on—tell me all."

"The pale-face, Big Pine," the chief went on, "had stolen the white maiden, June, from the wigwam of her mother, and carried her to the wigwam of the Evil Spirit who dwells on an island in the Lake-of-Isles. Her white lover, Black-Eagle, sought Crow Wing and asked for warriors to go and rescue the young woman. Crow Wing gave his consent and a hundred warriors went to the Lake-of-Isles and fought the pale-faces; but the guns of the latter were many, and many Sioux were slain, and they were defeated and fled from the island, taking with them their wounded and some of their dead comrades, and among the latter was your white friend, Black-Eagle. Malakah, the pride of my tribe was slain, too."

"Great Heavens! is Carl Costello dead, Crow Wing?"

"His spirit is in the happy hunting-grounds," the chief went on. "He was a brave warrior, and loved the young maiden most dearly."

"And are the pale-face hunters on the Lake-of-Isles yet?"

"They are."

"And will Crow Wing not avenge the death of his warriors?"

"The guns of the pale-faces are like the fish in the sea and the birds in the air. Crow Wing has been wishing for Mokomah to return, that he can counsel with him."

"Well, Crow Wing, I'm sorry to hear of this trouble; but I will go at once and see Moosehead and the wounded braves, and anoint their wounds. Then I will return, and we will talk together about this trouble."

So saying, the medicine-man arose and left the lodge.

In the course of an hour he returned, and meeting the chief at the door of his lodge, he pointed across the lake, and asked:

"Crow Wing, what craft is that lying over yonder on the waters of the lake?"

"The big boat of a pale-face," the chief answered. "He is a friend to the Sioux. He has given Crow Wing tobacco, and blankets, and beads, and many fine presents. He has eaten salt in Crow Wing's lodge, and Crow Wing has eaten the bread of the pale-face. He has a big gun on his boat, and it is turned toward the enemies of the Sioux."

"Indeed! Well, I should like to meet him," said Mokomah.

"He comes here every day— Ah, look! he comes now!"

True enough, a boat was seen to put out from the raft and come toward the village. In half an hour it had touched shore opposite the chief's lodge, and its occupant landed.

He was a tall, bearded man of fifty years or more. He had a cold, steel-gray eye, and a countenance that was not at all prepossessing. He wore a suit of gray and a white slouched hat, from beneath which hung thin locks of long, carrot hair.

The new-comer advanced toward Crow Wing's lodge, and as he and Mokomah came suddenly face to face, each started back as if confronted by a specter.

"Morgan Hanlon!" burst from the lips of Mokomah.

"Tomas Victor!" exclaimed the other.

Then recovering from their sudden surprise, the two men advanced and shook hands, apparently rejoiced to see each other, though it was plain to be seen that Hanlon was a little excited.

"You're the last man I ever expected to see here, Morgan Hanlon," Mokomah declared.

"And the same to you, Victor," replied Hanlon, "and in such an outfit of Indian trappings and fine things. What does it mean?"

"I'm known here as Mokomah, the White Medicine."

"And how long have you been here?"

"Off and on for years."

"You never told me of the fact, Victor."

"I know it. I tell nobody of where I'm going when I leave one place for another."

"But I have not seen you here before."

"I have been away for three months. I was over at St. Paul on a visit, and I came very near running down to Kentucky to see you and my fair lady. If I had I'd missel you; but how is Irene, anyhow? and what on earth ever brought you away into this wilderness so far from the land of Blue Grass?"

"I came off here on a health-trip," replied Hanlon, avoiding the other's gaze; "I have not been well for some time, and the doctor advised me to go north and spend a few months in the pine woods fishing and hunting and roughing it."

"Well, indeed; but you don't look much like an invalid."

"I'm feeling first-rate."

"And that's your floating palace over yonder?"

"Yes."

"Are you alone?"

"No; I have my black servants, Old Horace and Rachel, and also two other male friends with me."

"But you haven't told me about Irene yet—how is she? and what does she think of her old lover by this time?"

"She was well when I left home, and rebellious as ever," replied Hanlon, moving about in a manner that told he was ill at ease.

"Is she still struck on that young officer yet?"

"I can't say that she is as bad as she was."

"I wish to the Lord you'd brought her with you, Hanlon, and we'd have married at once. That matter must not be defeated. It was that which took me to St. Paul. I learned from my man there that there's no question about Doctor Franklin Hampton falling heir to a snug fortune in the death of a relative in New Orleans, and as he does not respond to the advertisements that have been standing in bold head-lines in the newspapers of the land for three years, the executors of the estate have come to the conclusion he is dead, and the next of kin will come in for the wealth, and that

person is his daughter who must first become my wife. Of course, it must not appear, in proving her right to it, that I had anything to do with her abduction, and as her grandmother is dead, I stand in no fear of detection. All the time I will be in any danger will be the short time it will take me to convert the property into cash, divide with you and skip. If my wife wants to go along well and good, but if not, she can stay and apply for a divorce, and renew her love with the gallant Rivers. But, Senor Hanlon, I presume your craft is supplied with your rich, old Kentucky Bourbon, and, perchance, some choice Havanas, such as gentlemen carry on pleasure and health excursions, and I'm going to beg an invitation to visit you aboard your boat. When you go back I believe I'll go over and spend the evening with you."

"Be glad to have you go, Tomas, but my stock of Bourbon is exhausted."

"Never mind that, Hanlon, for I know your stock of sociability is not exhausted," replied Mokomah, leading the way into the chief's lodge where all seated themselves and talked over the trouble at the Lake-of-Isles.

But all the while Hanlon seemed restless and uneasy, and at times became silent and meditative, though his old friend did not appear to notice it.

Morgan Hanlon remained for hours in the chief's tent. He said nothing about returning to his boat, and finally Mokomah arose, saying:

"I presume you'll soon be going back to your craft, Hanlon, so I'll run up to Moosehead's lodge and dress his wounded wrist, as I promised him. I will be back in half an hour and ready to go with you."

So saying, he left the lodge. Hanlon watched him until he was out of sight, then he hurried down to the lake, boarded his canoe and pulled out for his raft.

Half an hour later when Mokomah returned, and learned that his friend had gone off without him, a dark scowl settled upon his brow, and after a few moments' reflection he exclaimed:

"Caramba! that is most devilish cool! There's something wrong with Morgan Hanlon. He does not want me aboard his craft, but by heavens! I'll show him that I will not accept such an insult with impunity!"

And with a murderous scowl upon his face the man turned and entered his lodge.

CHAPTER XV.

RESULT OF IMP'S ADVENTURE

POLAR SOL and his friends listened in breathless silence to the tender, wailing cry that had startled them so suddenly, as they sat in their boat awaiting the return of Imp from the mysterious raft.

"In the name o' mystery, what is it, anyhow?" queried Polar Sol, completely astounded.

"It's the cry o' a baby," declared Dismal, "a real, genuine, royal baby, with lungs that it knows how to use—ah! listen to that!—shoutin'—low calls out on the water! Boys, that's somethin's broke loose, and I do wonder if that black boy isn't at the bottom o' it all? Jist like as any way that cryin' business is some—"

The hunter's remarks were here cut short by a low "yook, yook," that they knew, well enough, came from the lips of the Elf of the Woods.

The crying of the child had ceased, and as the hunters relapsed into silence after the boy's signal-cry, the dip of a paddle fell upon their ears.

"Look sharp, boys!" exclaimed Tamarac Tom, "for a trap! There's a canoe approachin'!"

The three men lifted their revolvers from their holsters ready for instant use, but as they did so, their ears were greeted by a voice calling out from the strange canoe:

"Say, Mars' Sol, whar be you, anyhow?"

"Here, Imp; come on and bear a little to the left," responded Sol.

"By Jovel the kid's stolen a boat from the raft!" declared Dismal.

The next moment a canoe glided alongside that of the hunters, who were completely astounded to see in it, beside the little form of Imp, a cloaked figure from the depths of whose wrappings came the plaintive sob of an infant.

"Imp!" exclaimed Old Sol, "what does this mean?"

"Golly, Mars' Sol," replied the boy, "I've made the biggestest haul you eber see. I done stole de canoe wid de missus and her pickaninny, and I guess de folks am lookin' for us 'bout now."

"Who is the lady you have in the boat?"

"By jingo, massa, forgit to ask her."

"Sir," said the woman, speaking in a low,

timid voice, "I am the daughter of Morgan Hanlon."

"The boss o' that raft lyin' out yare?"

"Yes, sir," she answered.

"But we can't 'zactly understand why you're here."

"Oh, sir! I hardly know myself," she replied.

"My good woman," said Sol, in a kindly voice, "I see you're excited and nervous. I hope our Imp hasn't been actin' ugly and saucy—"

"Oh, no, sir!" exclaimed the woman. "If you mean this little boy, I must say he is a kind, brave youth."

"But how does it come you are here, ma'am?"

"For some reason or other, my father told me, about two hours ago, that I must leave the raft and go ashore at once," the woman said. "He would not tell me why he wished me and my old nurse, Rachel, to leave the boat, but said we must go. Preparations were being made to take us. I was placed with my babe in this canoe, which lay alongside the raft. Old Rachel had gone back to our tent on the boat to get some things necessary to our comfort on shore. Old Horace, Rachel's husband, who was to take us to land, was busy somewhere else and my father, who held the lantern when I was helped into the canoe, turned away, leaving me in darkness. It was at this instant I imagined I felt the canoe moving, but my baby beginning to cry, I thought no more about it, but gave my attention to the child, and when it had become hushed and I looked up, I found I was adrift some distance from the raft. My first impulse was to cry out, but at the instant I was rendered speechless by a strange voice speaking low in my ear, and I saw the outlines of a little figure apparently standing on the water at my side. He seemed to know I was almost terrified, and told me he was my friend, and that his master and Captain Rivers wanted to see me. My heart leaped with joy at the mention of that name, and instantly, almost, my fears vanished, and I begged the boy to help me to escape. But, gentlemen, can you tell me who this Captain Rivers is?"

"Madam," said Old Polar, "if you know any Captain Rivers at all, the one the boy told you 'bout must be your husband!"

A little cry burst from the woman's lips.

"I cannot understand, sir," she said, with tremulous voice, "how you, all strangers, know who I am."

"I war with the captain the other evening on the banks o' the Red River when we caught a glimpse o' you—that is, it war you, if you war the only white woman on the raft. The captain started at sight o' you, but as the boat quickly floated into the shadows, he only got a glimpse o' your face, and a creek before us prevented our follerin' you up. But if your name's Irene you're Jack Rivers's wife."

"That is my name," she replied. "Oh, I pray, friends, that you will take me to my husband, and protect me from the power of my cruel father!"

"That's what we'll do, Mrs. Jack Rivers," declared Polar Sol; "but pardon the axin'; is that baby yours?"

"It is, sir, my child."

"The reason I axed is because I didn't hear the captain say anything 'bout—"

"No, sir, I presume not, for he has never seen our child. It was born but three weeks ago on yonder raft."

"Wal, I'll be blessed!" exclaimed Dismal, "will wonders never cease? But the strangest o' all is you folks bein' away here in this land o' savages."

"I was lured here by deception—the deception of my father. Do not think me cruel to speak thus of my father, for I cannot do otherwise than tell the truth. I married Captain Rivers against his will, because he was determined to compel me to marry one Tomas Victor, a Spaniard and a man older than he. But when I told him of my marriage with Jack Rivers he appeared to forgive me, and was determined I should go at once and join my husband, notwithstanding he knew I was expecting the captain home soon. But not wishing to oppose him further, I consented to go with him, for he had promised to accompany me to my husband. But little did I dream that his apparent kindness was a cruel plan to get me from home and into this dreadful country. After we were upon the Red River he revealed his scheme to me. He declared Jack Rivers should never see his child, and that—"

"Well, he will, though, confound it!" declared Old Sol; "but I hear voices on the lake callin'; I reckon they're huntin' you. Surely they don't expect you to answer them."

"Guess dey think wind drif' boat away," said

Imp, with a low, boyish laugh, "and if ever dey finds out dis colored chicken am dat wind dey'll make de air crackle wid cuss-words and mad."

"But what ever put it into your head to steal this boat and lady away from the raft?"

"Gosh! my head not all skull-bone. Didn't I hear de lady sobbin' when she got into de boat, and say she'd rather be drowned wid her pickaninny dan to go 'way into be black, greary woods? Didn't I hear her daddy say cuss-words, and tell her he'd kill de young'un if she staid? Say, wa'n't dat hint 'nuff for me to tooken a holt and he'p de lady, eh?"

"Yes, Imp, you did right; you're a brave, sensible boy," said Dismal; "but Mrs. Rivers, how many persons are there now aboard that raft?"

"Five men and one woman—the latter, Old Rachel, the negress."

"One more question, ma'am, and then I'll ax you no more: did it ever occur to you that the man you call your father is not your father?"

The woman uttered a little cry, and in evident pain replied:

"What else do you men know of me and my history? I am sure Jack Rivers never intimated such a thing to you, for not until the past three weeks did I learn that I was not the daughter of Morgan Hanlon. I learned it from Old Rachel who has been in Hanlon's family thirty years. At a time, three weeks ago, when it was thought I was dying, the old woman told me that I was only Hanlon's adopted child. She said I had been left there when but a little girl, but who it was that left me, and who my people were, she knew not. Can you tell me, gentlemen?"

"It are altogether likely, Irene Rivers," responded Old Sol, "that, by the bedside o' your sick husband attends your father, a grand, brave, silent gentleman o' whom you'll be proud if he's your parent, and I guess there's no doubt o' it, missus."

The woman uttered a low cry of joy, and clasping her baby closer to her breast, nestled her face against the infant's and endeavored to stifle the conflicting emotions within her wildly fluttering heart.

There was a momentary silence, for the woman's sobs and emotions touched deeply the hearts of the hunters. But the silence was suddenly broken by a voice calling aloud:

"I—reene! Oh, Missus I—reene!"

"It is poor Old Rachel calling me," the woman said; "the dear, kind old soul! she has been a kind friend and mother to me. Oh! I wish she was with me!"

"We'll go and git her," said Polar.

"No, do not go to the raft. They will surely harm you, for no stranger has been permitted to go aboard the raft."

"We'll risk our lives, Mrs. Rivers, on that craft," responded Sol, "and if Tamarac Tom and Imp will take you on to the mouth of the lagoon and wait for us there, we'll go and try and get your nurse, and anything else you want. I think most o' the crew is absent on the lake huntin' you."

"You are very kind, gentlemen, and I hope you will not endanger your lives in my behalf further than you have."

"We've a curiosity, ma'am," said Old Dismal, "to board that boat, and the sooner we do it, the better the chance, I think."

Tom would like to have accompanied the old hunters, but he was too gallant to say one word likely to touch the sensitive feelings of the woman, and stepping into the boat with her and Imp, he seated himself and said, addressing the hunters:

"Pards, don't tarry too long, for we should be on our way to the Lake-of-Isles long before daylight exposes us to dangers."

Without any reply, Polar Sol dipped his paddle, and he and Dismal drifted off into the darkness.

CHAPTER XVI.

MOKOMAH'S VISIT TO THE RAFT.

ONCE more we will go back to the Indian village.

Mokomah—Tomas Victor—who was, as the reader has no doubt surmised, Doctor Dorantes, the Spaniard who had so persecuted Doctor Omar on the Island of Cuba—could not accept Hanlon's conduct in going off the raft without him otherwise than as an insult. At first he was tempted to board a canoe and follow him; but after some reflection, he concluded to wait and give his friend an opportunity to explain his conduct.

That night the chief called a council of all his war-chiefs to discuss the situation. Mokomah was present. The young chiefs were for imme-

diately war. They held in terms of eloquence that the spirits of their friends slain on the Lake-of-Isles were crying aloud for vengeance. With all the policy of an adroit and cunning diplomat, Mokomah talked in favor of war, and yet counseled care and caution in a way calculated to discourage any decided action.

The council did not break up until nearly midnight. No definite plans had been decided upon when it did.

From the Council Lodge the medicine-man went to the lodge of his friend, Moosehead, to dress his wounded wrist. This took him but a few minutes, and he started on his return to his own quarters. His way lay along the beach. The waves were breaking in gentle murmurs at his feet.

Suddenly he heard the dip of a paddle. He stopped. He saw a boat creep out of the fog and touch the beach near where he stood.

"Who's there?" the doctor demanded.

"A friend, Pascal Moore, from the raft on the lake," was the boatman's response.

"What brings you here at this time of night?"

"A canoe went adrift from the raft."

"But why hunt for it to-night?"

"Ay! Captain Hanlon's daughter and child were in it."

"Hanlon's daughter and child?" queried Mokomah in evident surprise.

"Yes, sir, and I'm lookin' for 'em down the wind," replied Moore.

"What was her name—I mean her first name?"

"Irene."

"Irene!" repeated the medicine-man, "and what was she doing in the boat?"

"Cap. Hanlon was goin' to send her ashore."

"To this village?"

"No, sir—somewheres south."

"And you say she had a child?"

"I did."

"Her own?"

"Yes, sir; a young babe."

"Well, I have heard nothing of them," said Mokomah and returning the man strode on, the fury of an enraged demon burning in his breast.

Hastening on to his own quarters he awoke his servant and ordered him to get a boat in readiness for him to visit the raft. This the man soon did, and in a few minutes more the wrathful Mokomah was paddling across the lake alone. Guided by the light on the raft he made his way straight toward it, and when within a few strokes of the craft, a voice called out:

"Who is there?" It was Morgan Hanlon's voice.

"Pascal Moore," answered the quick-witted Mokomah in a disguised tone.

"And you found nothin' of Irene, nor the boat?"

"Nothing," responded Mokomah, leaping aboard the raft and confronting Hanlon within the full glare of a lantern that hung to a beam above them; "but I have found, Morgan Hanlon, that you are playing me a double and treacherous game!"

"Tomas Victor!" exclaimed Hanlon, almost dumfounded by the other's presence, "why—why, sir, do you accuse me thus?"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Victor in cold, sneering tones, "you need not attempt the 'injured-innocent' dodge on me. I know now why you left the village to-day without me. Why didn't you tell me at first that Irene was aboard this boat? and that she is the mother of a child? Did you steal off here into this remote corner of creation in hopes of hiding her shame from me and the world? Hanlon, you're a scoundrel!"

"Tomas Victor!" cried Hanlon with flashing eyes, "I may be a scoundrel, for I have had an expert teacher in you, but, sir, I'm not a coward! Let us keep cool. I did not bring Irene here to conceal her shame from you and the world, for hating you, she married Jack Rivers. It was a secret marriage, but legal as any ever consummated, and there is no shame to conceal, except yours and mine."

"Then why have you brought her here?" asked Victor.

"I have tried to convince her her marriage was illegal, and that—"

"I see your object, Morgan Hanlon," interrupted Victor; "you need not try to explain anything. You have been caught trying to play me a sly game; but if you had known Cortez Dorantes, as Doctor Franklin Hampton, the true father of Irene did, you would never have dared to deceive him. Hanlon, I denounce you as a villain and scoundrel—a sneaking cur and a cowardly—"

He did not finish the sentence for a pistol in

Hanlon's hand rung out and the villain of many names reeled backward with a cry of pain, then leaped forward like a wounded tiger upon Hanlon. The two grappled and fell heavily upon the deck in a death-struggle.

Old Rachel, the negress, who was alone on the boat with them, ran shrieking to the wall-tent standing in the center of the craft.

To and fro the combatants rolled on the deck. Knives gleamed in their hands. The boat trembled under the violence of their blows.

In the midst of the fight two men sprung aboard the craft and hurried to the scene of conflict. They were Polar Sol and Old Dismal.

Quickly the borderman dragged the combatants apart, but neither of them arose to his feet. Dorantes made a few attempts to rise, but each time fell back, and finally his strength gave out; he stretched himself at full length on the deck, rattled in the throat and was dead.

The hunters having made sure no other enemies were aboard the boat, sought out Old Rachel whom they found crouching in terror in the tent, and relieved her of her fears by words of kindness and the assurance of their protection.

Low moans of agony from Morgan Hanlon's lips called the hunters to his side. Dismal held the lantern close to his pain-contorted face and saw that the pallor of death was settling upon it. He lay in a pool of blood and when the hunters attempted to move him he cried out in agony and begged them to let him die there. The presence of the bordermen did not disconcert him in the least. He knew no enemy—no friend now. Only the fear of God's judgment was before him. He called aloud for Rachel, and when the terrified negress came trembling to his side, he lifted his glazing eyes and said:

"Rachel, I'm dying!"

"Oh, Massa Hanlon, don't say dat!" cried the negress, wringing her hands; "what'll po' ole Horace and Rachel do if you dies?"

"Tell Irene, if you meet her again, to take care of you," Hanlon replied. "Rachel, I have not been a bad man all my life, and not until I was reduced almost to poverty and your good old mistress died, did I consent to serve the devil to retrieve my lost fortune. You never knew, Rachel, that the man who left little Irene with me twenty years ago was Tomas Victor. I did not know myself until two years ago that she was not Victor's child. He told me then that her father's name was Dr. Frank Hampton, and that he had stolen the child from her grandmother to torture her father. Then he told me that Frank Hampton had fallen heir to a large property, but as he was supposed to be dead Irene would inherit it. Victor proposed to me that he and I should possess it. His plans were for him to marry Irene and then proceed to establish her right to the fortune without exposing himself as the man who abducted her. He had friends to help him in this, and I had the heartlessness to enter into the conspiracy against Irene—she, who had been a daughter to me in every sense of the word—kind and affectionate. But the reward I have received in all this crime is cold steel driven into my body. Perhaps it's just; I deserved it. I had no business dragging Irene into this place by deception, and, moreover, I knew not that the very man from whom I wished to keep all evidence of Irene's marriage a secret was here. When Irene told me that she and Captain Rivers had been secretly married while she was visiting in Ohio, I endeavored to make her believe it was illegal. She showed me the certificate of the marriage. This I kept, and made her believe I had destroyed it. It is in my trunk in the tent. I want you to take it, Rachel, and give it to her, with my best wishes. Tell her how I died, and that my dying request is that she will forgive me if she can."

"But, look here, stranger," said Old Dismal, "do you know that Captain Rivers is in this neighborhood?"

"I knew he was a month or so ago," answered the wounded man; "I saw him and other men on the river-bank. I was surprised to see him in this country, and my fears were aroused. I fired upon the party with my gun, and they disappeared. That night my scout, Peter Zull, whom I kept ashore, in the guise of a peddler, was slain in the captain's tent by an unknown enemy."

"How did you find that out?" asked Dismal.

"Zull failing to report at the proper time, I became uneasy about him," answered Hanlon, "and sent another man ashore to see about him. This man visited the captain's tent, and while there was accused by one Polar Sol of slaying Zull, but he got away unharmed. I have kept

from Irene the fact of having seen Rivers in this country; but I did not suppose he was still about nor that he had discovered who was aboard this boat."

"And I reckon, stranger," said Sol, "that you didn't know that Peter Zull was a confederate o' that very man lyin' there dead, who told you, for we heard him, that his true name was Cortez Dorantes."

"I did not. How do you know?" asked Hanlon.

"I know so," replied Sol; "he was recognized by the man who chopped off his head as Juan Alvar, one o' the villains who aided Dorantes in his conspiracy against Doctor Hampton when he was in Cuba."

"Then, Dorantes, or Victor, as I have known him, has kept a spy on my movements," Hanlon said. "I first met Zull—at—but then it makes no difference now. Oh! but it is hard to die in this manner!"

"You should 'a' thought o' that before, old man," said Sol.

"Yes, that is true, stranger. There is no one to blame but myself and Tomas Victor. But he has gone to his account and I will soon follow."

Thus the dying man talked on for more than an hour. In the mean time, the three boats that were out came in. Not one of the four men knew what had transpired on the raft until they had landed thereon, and been confronted by Sol and Dismal, and disarmed. As they came in one and two at a time, this was no trouble, though, when the man, Pierre Grevy, whom it will be remembered Polar Sol accused of murdering Peter Zull, the peddler, recognized the hunter, he was disposed to fight, when one of his own friends remonstrated with the plucky fellow and he gave up. When he did, Sol apologized for the wrong he had done him and this ended all feeling between them, for the time being, at least.

Before he died, Hanlon told his friends much they did not know of his conspiracy against the peace and happiness of Irene, and implored them to aid and protect her in the future.

When Polar Sol and Dismal finally left the raft, they were accompanied by Old Horace and Rachel, the three white men who remained behind aboard the raft, seeming quite anxious that the old colored folks should go. In the hunters' boat was carried Hanlon's trunk and Irene's effects, while the old colored couple followed behind in a second boat.

It was not far from morning when they entered the lagoon where Tamarac Tom, Imp and Irene were in waiting.

Old Horace and Rachel became almost frantic with joy on meeting their young mistress and her baby again. But the news of the terrible tragedy aboard the raft, and the confession of her father, almost prostrated the young mother; notwithstanding the fact that the death of the two men ended her dangers and restored her to her husband and father. But the kind words of the old bordermen who gave her the assurance that she should soon meet, not only with her gallant young husband, but the father he had never known, dispelled the shadows from her heart, and flooded her soul with the radiance of joyful promise.

CHAPTER XVII.

RE-UNITED.

THOSE left at Refuge Island noted every hour of the hunters' absence, for all were kept in great suspense and anxiety, not only for the safety of the three absent hunters and the success of their expedition, but their own safety, for Indians were seen skulking among the islands after the hunters left, and it was feared an attack would be made in their absence. It is true, the young chief, Malakah, was still an invalid at the cabin, receiving the treatment of Dr. Omar and the kindness of all. But whether he would, after all, show his gratitude by using his influence in behalf of the whites, was a question of some doubt. Moreover, the disappearance and prolonged absence of Imp, was an additional cause for alarm. It is true, the boy often left the island without saying a word to any one, and as he had never remained away so long, it was feared he had fallen into the hands of the redskins. His mother was almost distracted.

The night passed away, and day dawned with no tidings from any of the absent ones; but a couple hours later a buzz of excitement was created by the appearance of Polar Sol, accompanied by Imp, in a canoe upon the lake.

With a mingled feeling of hope and fear Dr. Omar hastened to meet them.

Sol and the boy had effected a landing on the island just as the doctor came up, and

looking up into his excited face, the hunter said:

"Wal, good-mornin', Doctor Franklin Hampton! How's things on the island?"

The doctor gave a quick start. His white face grew whiter. For a moment he stared like one bewildered at the hunter, then as his whirling brain caught a world of meaning in Sol's address, he answered with tremulous lips:

"Polar Sol, you are the first man I ever heard speak my true name on this island. It tells me much—that your mission to Moose Lake has been more than successful."

"That's 'bout the size o' it, doctor," declared Sol.

"Then that woman is Rivers's wife—"

"And your darter?"

"Blessed Father!" cried the doctor. "But where is she, Sol?"

"She and her baby are safe, and your old-time enemy, Doctor Cortez Dorantes, o' Cuba—alias Tomas Victor, o' America—alias Moko-mah, big sawbones and pill-dispenser o' Crow Wing's tribe—and Morgan Hanlon, the man who's had your darter ever since Dorantes stole her, and captain o' that raft, are deader'n smelts—fell out about the gal and tickled each other to death with knives. Dorantes never yawped after he got his medicine, but Hanlon lived two hours, and he lost no time in tryin' to unburden his guilty soul. In my time, doctor, I've hearn the confessions o' a score o' dyin' scoundrels, but I never heard one that had sich a flimsy pretext for bein' mean and low-lived as that man Hanlon. If I have as poor case as his when I come to die, I'll waive examination at the Judgment Bar, plead guilty, and go straight to dingnation. But, doctor, your darter's comin' back here with Dismal and Tamarac Tom. I come on ahead to break the news in small hunks to Cap Rivers, so's he wouldn't take a connip-tion."

"But, Sol, did you not speak of Irene and her baby?"

"Yes, Doc, she's got the all-firedest, dumplin'-ist little kid you ever see'd in your life. And sich lungs! Whew! git away, Comanches! Doctor, you're a grandfather, or I'm a goat!"

"Can it be possible," the doctor said, thoughtfully, "that the child I knew only as a prattling babe is now a mother?"

"Yes, Doc, and she's one o' the sweetest, fairest women I ever saw—blamed if I don't envy you and the captain both."

"I will go at once and break the news to Rivers."

The two started toward the cabin. They saw Old Hulda and her "baby" meet, and after the old woman had embraced her boy, she wiped her streaming eyes and then proceeded to berate the youth most soundly for his running away.

"Golly, mommy," Imp exclaimed, after she had run out of breath, "you's actin' queer. If I hadn't runned away, de exposition to de raft 'd 'a' been a plumb, smack failure, and I knowed, too. Oh, cracky! mommy, it'll make your face turn white wid joy when you sees de purty little sweet kitten ob a baby dat I—"

"Baby!" broke in the mother, with arms akimbo and a look of despair on her face.

"Imp, you mis'able black vagabone! I allers told youah ole daddy dat you war a born thief, and dat youah mean 'nuff to steal a baby from its mudder, and now you's gone and done it."

"Golly, Hulda," said the boy with a grin. "I stole the baby and its mudder too."

"Then fo' God you's a born liab, too!" groaned the distressed mother, wringing her hands and moaning in agony.

At this juncture Polar Sol, who had heard the conversation between the mother and son, came to the latter's rescue and vouched for the truthfulness of the gallant Imp's story.

Turning toward her young hopeful with a fond look and a changed voice, Old Hulda exclaimed:

"Honey, you little, black nigger, your ole mudder's proud ob you, chile! Come 'long and tell your ole daddy, 'bout your capers. It'll make dat Inging hatchet-hole in his he'd heal wid joy."

The look on Dr. Omar's face when he entered Jack Rivers's room told the young captain that the news from Moose Lake, was at least, favorable.

"Now, captain," said the doctor in as natural tone as he could command, "you know that we have heard from our friends, and you don't want to get excited over anything, or it will be the worse for you. I have no bad news, however, to give you. In fact, good news for you and I both has just been received."

"Ah!" said the young officer, calmly pointing to the portrait on the wall, "then that is the

portrait of your dead wife, and the mother of mine?"

"There are now no doubts of it, my boy."

"Then it was Irene that I saw on the raft?"

"It was, and she is safe and now on her way here."

"Thank God!" said Rivers; "but, doctor, is she alone?"

A faint smile passed over Omar's face, as he replied:

"No, she is accompanied by Tom and Dismal, her old nurse and her infant son."

A confused smile flitted over the captain's pallid face, a mist gathered in his eyes, and he turned his face to the wall to conceal his emotions.

Half an hour later the rest of the party from Moose Lake landed on Refuge Island. Dr. Omar and Old Sol met them at the landing, and there the meeting of the father and daughter took place. But we will not attempt to describe it, for our pen is inadequate to the task; but the reader can well imagine it was a most happy, joyous and affecting meeting, that moved to tears those who witnessed it.

Irene was fully apprised of the low condition of Captain Rivers, and the danger to him of undue excitement, so that when her father conducted her to the cabin and into the presence of her sick husband, she was fully prepared for the meeting. But when she looked upon his thin, emaciated face, it required all her splendid courage to maintain her composure. Never did a woman, whose mind and body had been undergoing for weeks the crucial tests of fear, grief and motherhood, conduct herself so nobly, so heroically, so self-possessed, as did Irene Rivers in the chamber of her sick husband. It was not a meeting of excitement and demonstrations, but one of quiet joy and burning love.

A few minutes after their first meeting, when Irene placed in Jack's arms the tiny bit of humanity, their own offspring—the golden link that binds in closer union the hearts of wedded love, the captain felt that his cup of bliss was full—that the crowning joy of his life had been bestowed upon him.

And the joy and happiness that filled the breasts of Doctor Omar, his child and her husband, was fully shared by the rest of their friends. But in the midst of their rejoicing they did not forget that they were surrounded by dangers. In fact, they were reminded of this nearly every hour of the day or night by the sight of Indian scouts among the islands, or upon the lake.

Two days had passed, however, in quiet, but one morning Polar Sol was startled by seeing a rude raft creep into sight of Refuge Island, on board of which was the cannon that had belonged to the raft of Morgan Hanlon. The craft anchored in the lake beyond rifle-range of the island, the muzzle of the gun was turned toward the cabin of the recluse, and a shot sent screaming over the house, the boom of the gun awakening a thousand slumbering echoes.

Immediately after the discharge of the gun, scores of canoes filled with red-skins were seen hovering about the islands, and that another attack, and that too by day, was to be made, there seemed no doubt. But more than the red-skins the islanders dreaded that terrible gun on the raft.

"It's a terrible mistake, Dismal," said Polar Sol, "that we didn't spike that gun or tumble it into the lake when it was at our mercy."

"Yes, and a wuss one that we didn't shoot them three men we left there, for they're the very varmints that'll handle that gun. They've made peace with the red-skins and war against us, and we're in no shape to fight ag'inst cannon."

While they were thus conversing a canoe with two occupants, a white man and an Indian, was seen approaching the island with a white rag tied to a stick.

"It's a flag o' truce!" exclaimed Sol, "and we'll soon know what is wanted."

The boat soon landed and the truce-bearers approached the cabin. One of them proved to be Pierre Grevy and the other no less personage than Crow Wing, the great chief, himself.

Dr. Omar, Polar Sol, Old Dismal and Tom Pope met the two men just outside of the line of abattis, and received them kindly.

After a few moments of preliminary remarks, Grevy, upon whose face there was a look of malicious cunning, said:

"We have come to demand of you the person of Big Pine, for the murder of four Sioux warriors, and the maiden, June, who is held a captive by you."

"And suppose we refuse to give 'em up?" replied Sol.

"We'll batter down your cabin, and turn a thousand warriors loose upon this island!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CONFERENCE AND A CONCLUSION.

It was quite evident to the islanders that Pierre Grevy had no other object in his demands on the whites than mere petty spite, growing out of his and Polar Sol's difficulty in the tent the night Peter Zull was slain. But while he was delivering, in his grandiloquent style, the ultimatum of a refusal to comply with their demands, Crow Wing was startled by an apparition that he saw coming slowly toward him from the direction of the cabin. It was Malakah, the young war-chief, who, thin and emaciated, looked more like a specter than his former self.

But Crow Wing knew him, and with a light of joy beaming upon the old chief's face, he exclaimed:

"Malakah is alive! We have mourned him as dead! We knew not he was a captive in the power of the pale-face."

"Malakah is not a captive," replied the young chief, in his own language, which we translate. "He was wounded in battle, and the pale-face took him into his wigwam and dressed his wounds and gave him food. Though the pale-faces wounded Malakah they have saved his life. They are brave in war and kind and generous in peace. But why does Crow Wing's warriors gather on the lake? And why does Crow Wing come here?"

"To demand the Big Pine, who slew my warriors, and June, who is a captive here," answered the old chief.

"June is not a captive here," replied Malakah. "She remains here because she loves Big Pine, and Big Pine slew the warriors because they were sent by Black Eagle without your knowledge to slay Big Pine. Crow Wing has been deceived by the white men who claimed to be his friends. They have incited warriors to battle and death when nothing was involved but self-interest. Let Crow Wing listen to Malakah. He can tell him much."

"Malakah is a wise young chief," responded Crow Wing. "His voice is the voice of wisdom. Crow Wing has missed his counsel more than all others. Let him speak."

And Malakah did speak, in tones of thunder, as it were.

He denounced in unsparing terms the white men who had lived among them as pretended friends. To them he laid all the recent troubles with the whites on the island. He wound up with an appeal for the whites who had so tenderly nursed him through the worst of his suffering, and declared that if war was made upon a single one of them, he would remain and die fighting with them.

The conference lasted more than an hour. Malakah succeeded, most effectually, in turning the head of Crow Wing; and the old chief returned to the lake, called his warriors around him and harangued them for an hour or more. His speech was accepted with shouts of joy and approval; and when the raft with the swivel-gun upon it was seen to drift away out of sight, the islanders knew they were to have no further trouble with the red-skins—that their kindness to Malakah, and his gratitude and influence, had saved them; though Pierre Grevy, in his heart of hearts, no doubt, wished that Malakah had died of his wounds, or had never been born.

Before leaving for his village, Crow Wing came back to the island with a few of his warriors. He was given a fine reception, Old Sol and Dismal knowing exactly how to flatter his savage vanity. When he went away he was given many presents including the entire pack of the peddler, Peter Zull.

Malakah remained under the treatment of Dr. Omar for several days after the threatened assault on the island; and nearly every day old Crow Wing or some of his followers visited the island. Among the first arrivals was June's mother, a careworn and sad-faced woman, who, upon learning from her daughter that she never intended to return to the Indian village, became almost distracted. But when June and Tom Pope, and all the others appealed to the old lady to give up her Indian home and go with them to the land of civilization, where she could always be near her child, she heard them and at once decided that she would go.

Three weeks after the rescue of Irene from the raft on Moose Lake, the entire party on Refuge Island embarked in boats for the south. Dr. Omar having presented to Crow Wing and Malakah everything belonging to him that could not be taken along with them.

Their journey was a long and laborious one unattended with any incident to break the monotony of the trip, until they arrived at the cabin of Father Lille, a Jesuit missionary, living a short distance beyond the settlement of Frenchtown. There they halted for a few days' rest, and while there Tom Pope and the fair June were married by the good priest.

Continuing on the party passed Buzzard Bend and stopped over night in Convict Cave at the mouth of the Menomine.

The next day they reached Deer Lodge, the home of Old Dismal. Here the party remained several days visiting with Polar Sol and Dismal, for the hunters were going no further. Their services were no longer needed for they were now beyond all dangers.

The most affecting scene of all was when the hour of separation from the old bordermen had come. The hunters had walked with the party down to the river-bank where the boats were in waiting. There the parting took place, the boats pulled out and started on their southward journey.

Standing on the bank, the bordermen watched the receding boats—answering the farewell waving of hands and hats—and when the last one had passed from sight, Old Dismal said:

"There, Polar, old pard, that closes the second act o' our life-drama in which the wickedness o' men, cruelty o' savages—gals, boys, lovers, babies mysteries have all come and played their part, rung down the curtain and gone, and here we old buccaneers still are."

"Yes, Dismal, ready for the next act," replied Polar Sol, "so let old Time ring up the curtain again, and we old artists, with gun and pistol, will be found on deck."

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